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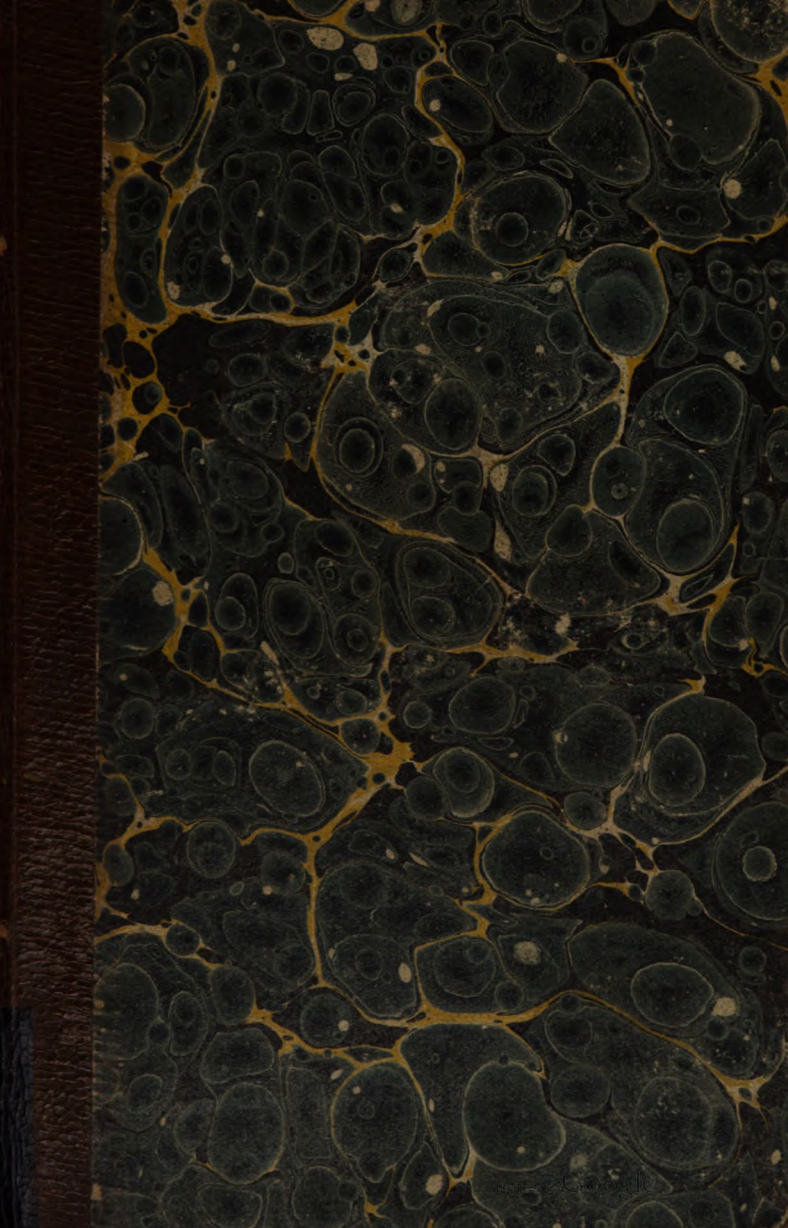
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# COLOMBA

## A CORSICAN STORY.

BY

PROSPER MÉRIMÉE.

TRANSLATED BY ANDREW B. SCOBLE.

"Pè far la to vendetta,  
Sta Sigur', vasta anche ella."

*Focero da Niolo.*



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# COLOMBA.

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## CHAPTER I.

IN the early part of October, in the year 18—, Colonel Sir Thomas Nevil, an Irish officer who had served with distinction in the British army, arrived with his daughter at the Hotel Beauveau, at Marseilles, on his return from a journey through Italy. The unbounded admiration of enthusiastic travellers has produced its corresponding reaction, and, in order to appear singular, many tourists at the present day adopt as their motto the *Nil admirari* of Horace. The Colonel's only daughter, Miss Lydia Nevil, belonged to this class of discontented tourists. She considered the Transfiguration a picture of moderate excellence, and thought Vesuvius in eruption very little superior to the chimneys of the Birmingham



manufactories. In short, her chief objection against Italy was its want of local colour and character. Let those who can, explain the meaning of these words,—I understood their signification some years ago, but now I cannot comprehend them in the least. On leaving home, Miss Lydia had hoped to find, on the other side of the Alps, a number of things which no one had seen beside herself, and about which she might converse “in good society,” as M. Jourdain says. Ere long, however, finding that her countrymen had anticipated her in every direction, she began to despair of meeting with anything previously unknown, and she joined the ranks of the opposition party. It is really very disagreeable not to be able to speak about the wonders of Italy, without some one saying: “Of course you saw that Raphael at the Palazzo So-and-so, in Such-and-such a place? It’s the finest thing in Italy.” And yet, it is the very thing you have omitted to see. As it would take too long a time to see everything, the simplest plan is to find fault with everything, on principle.

At the Hotel Beauveau Miss Lydia met with a sad disappointment. She had taken

a very pretty sketch of the Pelasgic or Cyclopean port of Segni, which she thought had been overlooked by the artists. At Marseilles, she met Lady Frances Fenwick, who showed her her album, in which, between a sonnet and a withered flower, she beheld a drawing of the port in question, tastefully coloured. Miss Lydia gave the port of Segni to her waiting-maid, and lost all respect for Pelasgic constructions.

This unhappy state of mind was shared by Colonel Nevil, who, ever since the death of his wife, had seen everything through the eyes of Miss Lydia. In his opinion, Italy had committed the grievous offence of having wearied his daughter, and, consequently, he thought it the most tiresome country in the world. He had nothing to say, it is true, against the pictures and statues; but of one thing he was sure, that the shooting was miserable, for after marching ten leagues through the Roman Campagna, under a scorching sun, he had only succeeded in killing a few wretched red-legged partridges.

On the day after his arrival at Marseilles, he invited his old adjutant, Captain Ellis, to dine with him. The Captain had just spent

six weeks in Corsica; and he told Miss Lydia a bandit-story, which possessed the extraordinary merit of being quite unlike the robber-tales with which she had been surfeited on the road from Rome to Naples. After dinner, the two gentlemen, sitting alone over their wine, talked about sporting, and the Colonel learned that there was no country where game was more varied and plentiful than in Corsica.

"There are plenty of wild boars," said Captain Ellis, "which you must learn to distinguish from the domestic hogs, which are surprisingly like them; for if you kill a hog, you get into a great scrape with its owners. They issue from one of the copses, which they call *mdquis*, armed to the teeth, make you pay a round sum for the pig you have killed, and then laugh at you. Then, there's the mouflon, a very curious animal not found anywhere else, capital game, but difficult to get at. Besides, there are stags, deer, pheasants, partridges—indeed, all sorts of game swarm in Corsica. If you're fond of a shot, go to Corsica, Colonel; there, as my landlord used to say, you may fire at any game you like, from a thrush to a man."

At tea, the Captain delighted Miss Lydia again by a story of transversal vendetta,\* which was still more curious than his first tale. He completely aroused her enthusiasm for Corsica, by describing the wild and unique appearance of the country, the original character of its inhabitants, their hospitality, and their primitive manners. When he took his leave, he presented her with a pretty little stiletto, which was less remarkable for its form and ornamentation than for its history. A bandit chief had given it to Captain Ellis, declaring that it had transpierced four human bodies. Miss Lydia put it in her girdle, laid it upon her dressing-table, and took it twice out of its sheath before she went to bed. As for the Colonel, he dreamed that he had shot a mouflon, and that the proprietor had made him pay for it; which he was not at all unwilling to do, for it was a very remarkable animal, something like a wild boar, with horns like a stag, and a tail like a pheasant.

“Ellis tells me there’s some capital shooting in Corsica,” said the Colonel next morning, as he sat at breakfast with his daughter; “if

\* Vengeance inflicted on some relative of the author of an offence.

it were not so far off, I should like to spend a fortnight there."

"Well!" answered Miss Lydia, "why should we not go to Corsica? While you were shooting, I could sketch; indeed, I should very much like to have a drawing of the grotto Captain Ellis mentioned, where Bonaparte used to study when he was a child."

This was, perhaps, the first occasion on which a desire expressed by the Colonel had received his daughter's approbation. Though delighted at this novel occurrence, he had the good sense to make some difficulty about the matter, in order to stimulate Miss Lydia's lucky caprice. In vain did he speak of the wildness of the country, and the hardships a lady would undergo in travelling through it: nothing could daunt her; she was particularly fond of horseback, and would like, above all things, to bivouac at night in the open air; she even threatened to go to Asia Minor. She had an answer to every objection; no Englishwoman had ever been to Corsica—therefore, she must go. How proud she would be, on her return to St. James's Place, to show her album! She imagined her friends saying: "Why, my dear, did you pass over that charming sketch?"

“Oh! it’s a mere trifle—only a sketch of a famous Corsican bandit who was our guide for a little while.” “What! have you been to Corsica?——”

As no steamboats then plied between Corsica and France, enquiries had to be made for a vessel about to sail to the island which Miss Lydia proposed to discover. On the same day, the Colonel wrote to countermand the orders he had given for his reception in Paris, and bargained with the Captain of a Corsican schooner to convey him to Ajaccio. The vessel contained two tolerable cabins. A stock of provisions was placed on board; the Captain asseverated that an old sailor of his was an admirable cook, incomparable at a sea-pie; and promised that the young lady would be very comfortable, for they would have a good breeze and a quiet sea. In obedience to his daughter’s wish, the Colonel stipulated that the Captain should take no other passengers, and should contrive to skirt the coast of the island, so as to enable them to obtain a good view of the mountains.

## CHAPTER II.

ON the morning of the day fixed for their departure, their baggage was packed and sent on board at an early hour: the schooner was to sail with the evening breeze. While the Colonel was walking with his daughter on the Canebiere, the Captain came up to him and begged permission to take on board one of his relations, the second cousin of the godfather of his eldest son, who was anxious to return to Corsica, his native country, on pressing business, and could not find a ship to carry him over.

"He is a capital fellow," added Captain Matei, "a military man, an officer in the Foot Guards, who'd have been a colonel by this time if Napoleon were still Emperor."

"As he is a soldier," said the Colonel, and was going to add, "I am willing to consent to

his coming with us." But Miss Lydia exclaimed in English :

" An infantry officer ! " her father had served in the cavalry, and she therefore looked with contempt on the other branches of the army, — " a man without education, perhaps, who will be sea-sick, and will spoil all the enjoyment of our trip."

The Captain did not understand a word of English, but he seemed to divine what Miss Lydia was saying from the pout of her pretty mouth, and so he began to praise his relative in an elegant discourse, which he concluded by declaring that he was quite a gentleman, descended from a family of *corporals*, and that he would not be at all troublesome to the Colonel, for he, the Captain, undertook to lodge him in a corner where his presence would not be perceived.

Colonel and Miss Nevil thought it strange that there should be families of corporals in Corsica, in which the office descended from father to son ; but as they piously thought that the Captain referred to a corporal of infantry, they concluded that it was some poor fellow whom he wished to take over in charity. If it had been an officer, they would have been



obliged to talk to him, and live with him ; but there was no need to put themselves out of the way for a corporal, who is a person of no great consequence, unless he comes, at the head of his men, with fixed bayonets, to take you where you have no wish to go.

“Does your relative suffer from sea-sickness?” dryly inquired Miss Nevil.

“Never, Miss. His heart is as firm as a rock, both on sea and on land.”

“Well ! you may take him,” she answered.

“You may take him,” repeated the Colonel ; and they continued their walk.

At about five o'clock in the evening, Captain Matei came to tell them it was time to embark. On the quay, near the Captain's yawl, they saw a tall young man, in a blue coat closely buttoned to the chin, with a dark complexion, bright black eyes, and a frank and lively expression of countenance. That he was a soldier, they perceived by the way in which he held his shoulders, and by his small curly moustache ; for, at that period, moustaches were not so commonly worn as they are now, and the formation of the National Guard had not yet introduced a military bearing among the young men of every family.

The young man took off his cap when he saw the Colonel, and thanked him in good language, and without embarrassment, for the kindness he had done him.

“Delighted to be of service to you, my boy,” said the Colonel, nodding to him in a friendly manner, as he stepped into the boat.

“He is rather off-hand, this Englishman of yours,” said the young man to the Captain, in Italian, in a low tone.

The Captain placed his forefinger under his left eye, and let down the corners of his mouth. Those who understand the language of signs will know that he meant that the Englishman understood Italian, and was an odd kind of person. The young man smiled slightly, and touched his forehead in answer to Matei's sign, as much as to say that all the English were somewhat wrongheaded; then, sitting down by the Captain, he began to survey with much attention, but without impertinence, his pretty travelling-companion.

“These French soldiers are well-shaped fellows,” said the Colonel to his daughter, in English; “so they are easily made into officers.” Then, addressing the young man in French, he

said: "In what regiment did you serve, my brave lad?"

The young man slightly nudged the father of his second cousin's godson with his elbow, and, repressing an ironical smile, answered that he had been in the Foot Guards, and had just left the 7th light infantry.

"Were you at Waterloo? You are rather young, though, to have been there."

"Pardon me, Colonel; that was my only campaign."

"That counts double," said the Colonel. The young Corsican bit his lips.

"Papa," said Miss Lydia, in English, "ask him if the Corsicans are very fond of their Bonaparte."

Before the Colonel had translated the question into French, the young man answered in tolerably good English, though with a decidedly foreign accent.

"You know, Miss Nevil, that no man is a prophet in his own country. We, who are Napoleon's countrymen, do not, perhaps, love him so much as the French. For my own part, although my family was formerly at hostility with his, I love and admire him."

"So you speak English!" exclaimed the Colonel.

“Very indifferently, as you may perceive.”

Though somewhat provoked by his off-hand tone, Miss Lydia could not refrain from laughing at the idea that a personal animosity had existed between a corporal and an Emperor. This was, as it were, a foretaste of the singularities of Corsica, and she resolved to note it down in her journal.

“Were you ever a prisoner in England?” inquired the Colonel.

“No, Colonel; I learned to speak your language when I was quite young, from an English prisoner in France.” Then turning to Miss Nevil, he added: “Matei tells me you are just returned from Italy. You doubtless speak the pure Tuscan; and, in that case, I fear you will have some trouble to understand our patois.”

“My daughter understands all the Italian patois,” answered the Colonel: “she picks up a language with great facility, and, in that respect, she is very unlike her father.”

“Would Miss Nevil understand, for example, these lines of one of our Corsican songs? A shepherd says to a shepherdess:

“S’entrassi ’ndru Paradisu santu, santu,  
E nun trovassi a tia, mi n’esciria.” \*

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\* “If I were to enter holy Paradise, and did not find thee there, I would come out again.”

Miss Lydia understood him perfectly ; and, thinking the quotation rather bold, and the look which accompanied it still bolder, she replied with a blush : “ *Capisco*—I understand.”

“ Are you returning home on furlough ? ” inquired the Colonel.

“ No, Colonel. They have put me on half-pay, probably because I fought at Waterloo, and am a fellow-countryman of Napoleon. I am returning home with slight hopes, and a light purse, as the song says.” And the young man looked up to heaven with a sigh.

The Colonel put his hand in his pocket, took out a piece of gold, and sought an opportunity to slip it politely into the hand of his unlucky enemy. “ I, too, am on half-pay,” he said, good-humouredly ; “ but with your half-pay, I dare say you have not much to spend on tobacco. There, corporal.” And he tried to place the piece of money in his companion’s hand.

The young Corsican blushed, drew himself up, bit his lips, and seemed about to give an angry answer, when he suddenly changed his expression, and burst into a laugh. The Colonel was dumbfounded.

“ Colonel,” said the young man, resuming a serious tone, “ allow me to give you two pieces of advice. In the first place, never offer money

to a Corsican, for many of my countrymen would be rude enough to throw your gift at your head, in token of gratitude ; and secondly, never give people titles which they don't assume. You call me a corporal : I am a lieutenant. True, the difference of rank is not very great, but——”

“ A lieutenant !” exclaimed Sir Thomas ; “ a lieutenant ! but the captain told me that you were a corporal, as your father and all the men of your family had been before you.”

At these words the young man fell backwards, and began to laugh with all his might—so heartily, indeed, that the captain and his two sailors burst out in chorus.

“ Pray excuse me, Colonel,” said the young man at last ; “ but the *quid pro quo* is admirable, though I did not understand it until this moment. It is true that my family boasts of having numbered corporals among its ancestors ; but our Corsican corporals never wore epaulettes on their shoulders. About the year of grace, 1100, some communes revolted against the tyranny of the mountain lords, and chose leaders for themselves, whom they named *corporals*. In our island we think it an honour to be descended from these tribunes of the people.”

"I beg ten thousand pardons, sir," said the Colonel, holding out his hand; "but as you understand the cause of my mistake, I hope you will excuse it."

"It is only the just punishment of my petty pride, Colonel," said the young man, laughing, and shaking cordially the Englishman's proffered hand; "and I assure you I am not in the least offended. As my friend Matei has introduced me so incorrectly, pray allow me now to introduce myself. My name is Orso della Rebbia, lieutenant on half-pay; and if, as I presume from seeing those two beautiful dogs, you are going to Corsica to have a little sporting, I shall be very happy to do the honours of our woods and mountains—at least, if I have not forgotten them," he added, with a sigh.

Just then the boat reached the schooner's side. The lieutenant handed Miss Lydia on board, and then helped the Colonel to climb on deck. Sir Thomas, still very angry at his mistake, and anxious to show every attention to a man whose family dated from the year 1100, did not wait for his daughter's consent, but begged him to join them at supper, and renewed his apologies and hand-shakings. Miss Lydia frowned a little, but, on the whole, was not

sorry to learn what a Corsican corporal was; her guest was not displeasing to her, and she even began to discern in him a certain aristocratic air; his appearance was, however, too frank and gay for a hero of romance.

"Lieutenant della Rebbia," said the Colonel, bowing to him in the English manner, with a glass of Madeira in his hand; "I saw many of your countrymen in Spain—they were famous marksmen."

"Alas! yes, many of them remained in Spain," said the young lieutenant, sadly.

"I shall never forget the conduct of a Corsican battalion at the battle of Vittoria," pursued the Colonel. "Indeed I have good cause to remember it," he added, passing his hand over his chest. "During the whole day they had been shooting at us from the gardens and from behind the hedges, and had killed an immense number of our men and horses. When a retreat was decided upon, they rallied, and marched off at a great rate. When they reached the plain, we hoped to take our revenge, but the rascals—excuse me, lieutenant—the brave fellows had formed themselves into a square, and there was no means of breaking their line. In the midst of the square—I think I see him.



now—was an officer mounted on a small black horse; he stood beside the eagle, smoking his cigar as unconcerned as if he had been in a *café*. Sometimes, as if in contempt, their music played merrily. I sent my first two squadrons against them—pshaw! instead of making any impression upon the front of their square, my dragoons passed on one side, turned, and came back in great disorder, and with considerable loss—still that confounded music continued. When the smoke which enveloped the battalion had dispersed, I saw the officer by the side of the eagle still smoking his cigar. In a rage, I placed myself at the head of my men for a final charge. The enemy had not had time to reload, but had now formed in six ranks, with their bayonets fixed; it was a perfect wall! I shouted, I cheered onward my dragoons, and was spurring my horse forward, when the officer whom I have mentioned, taking his cigar from his mouth, pointed me out to one of his men. I heard something like *Al capello bianco!* I had a white plume in my cap. I heard nothing further, for a ball passed through my chest. It was a fine battalion, M. della Rebbia, the first of the 18th light infantry, all Corsicans, as I was told afterwards.”

"Yes," said Orso, who had listened to this tale with sparkling eyes; "they made good their retreat, and carried off their eagle; but two-thirds of those brave fellows now sleep in the plain of Vittoria."

"Do you happen to know the name of the officer who commanded them?"

"It was my father. He was then major of the 18th, and was made colonel for his conduct on that unhappy day."

"Your father! upon my honour, he was a brave man! I should be delighted to see him again, and should recognize him, I am sure. Is he still alive?"

"No, Colonel," said the young man, turning pale.

"Was he at Waterloo?"

"Yes, Colonel; but he had not the good fortune to fall on the battle-field. He died in Corsica—two years ago—but how beautiful this sea is! It is ten years since I last saw the Mediterranean. Do you not think the Mediterranean more beautiful than the Ocean, Miss Nevil?"

"I think it too blue—and the waves are wanting in grandeur."

"Ah, then, you are fond of wild beauty. In that case I, think Corsica will please you."

"My daughter," said the Colonel, "likes everything extraordinary; on that account she was much disappointed with Italy."

"I know no part of Italy," said Orso, "except Pisa, where I spent some time at college; but I cannot think without admiration of the Campo Santo, of the Duomo, of the Leaning Tower,—but especially of the Campo Santo. Do you remember Orgagna's picture of Death—I think I could draw it now, it has remained so deeply fixed in my memory."

Miss Lydia began to fear that the young Corsican was about to indulge in an enthusiastic tirade on Italian paintings.

"It is very pretty," she said, yawning. "Excuse me, papa, I have a slight headache, and wish to retire to my own room."

She kissed her father on the forehead, made a majestic curtsey to Orso, and disappeared. The two gentlemen went on talking about war and field-sports. In the course of conversation they learned that they had been opposite each other at Waterloo, and must have exchanged many bullets. Their good understanding increased. They alternately criticised Napoleon; Wellington, and Blucher, and chased the stag, the wild-boar, and the mouflon, together. At

length, when the night was rather far advanced, and the last bottle of Bordeaux emptied, the Colonel again shook the lieutenant by the hand, and wished him good evening, expressing his hope that he would be able to cultivate an acquaintance which had commenced in so ridiculous a manner. Then, they separated, and each went to his berth.

## CHAPTER III.

THE night was fine, the moonbeams played upon the water, and the vessel sailed pleasantly along under a light breeze. Miss Lydia was not at all sleepy, and the presence of a stranger had alone prevented her from giving expression to those emotions which every human being, with two grains of poetry in his heart, cannot fail to experience when beholding the sea by moonlight. When she imagined that the young lieutenant was sound asleep, like a prosaic being that he was, she rose, put on a pelisse, woke up her waiting-maid, and went on deck. A sailor was standing at the helm, singing a plaintive song in the Corsican dialect, to a wild and monotonous air. In the calm of night, this singular music had a peculiar charm. Unfortunately Miss Lydia did not entirely understand what the sailor was singing. In the

midst of many commonplaces, an occasional vigorous verse strongly excited her curiosity; but whenever her attention was thus riveted, some words of patois would invariably occur, which prevented her from catching its full meaning. She understood, however, that the song had reference to a murder. Imprecations against the assassin, threats of vengeance, and praises of the victim, were mingled together in strange confusion. She remembered some verses, which ran somewhat thus :

“Neither cannon, nor bayonets—could pale his countenance.—Serene was he on the battle field—as a summer sky.—He was like the falcon, friend of the eagle,—sweetest honey to his friends,—to his enemies an angry sea.—Loftier was he than the sun,—and gentler than the moon.—Him whom the enemies of France—never could injure,—assassins of his own country—struck from behind,—as Vittolo\* slew Sampiero Corso.—Never would they have dared to look him in the face.—. . . Place upon the wall before my bed—my well-earned cross of honour.—Red is its ribbon,—redder

\* See Filippini, book xi. The name of Vittolo is still held in execration by the Corsicans, and used as a synonym for traitor.

still my shirt.—My son, my son, in distant lands,—Keep my cross and my bloody shirt.—He will see in it three holes,—for each, there must be a hole in another shirt.—But will vengeance then be executed?—I must have the hand that inflicted,—the eye that guided,—the heart that devised. . . .”

Here the sailor stopped abruptly.

“Why don’t you go on, my friend?” asked Miss Nevil.

The sailor, by a movement of his head, pointed out to her a figure which had just risen from the schooner’s hold. It was Orso, who had come to enjoy the moonlight scene.

“But finish your song,” said Miss Nevil. “I was much pleased with it.”

The sailor leaned towards her, and said, in a low tone, “I give the *rimbeccu* to no one.”

“The what?”

The sailor made no reply, but began to whistle.

“I’m sure you must admire our Mediterranean, Miss Nevil,” said Orso, coming up to her. “Admit that you never saw such a moon as this anywhere else.”

“I was not looking at it. I was studying

Corsican very diligently. This sailor has been singing a most tragical ditty, but stopped short at the very finest part of it."

The sailor stooped down as if to watch the compass more closely, and pulled Miss Nevil rudely by the pelisse. It was evident that he could not sing his song in Orso's presence.

"What song were you singing, Paolo Francè?" said Orso; "was it a *ballata*? a *vocero*?"\* Miss Nevil understands you, and would like to hear the end of it."

"I have forgotten it, Ors' Anton'," said the sailor, who immediately began to sing a hymn to the Virgin at the top of his voice.

Miss Lydia listened impatiently to the hymn, and asked the singer no further questions, resolving to have the mystery cleared up at some more convenient time. But her waiting-maid, who came from Florence, and understood the Corsican dialect no better than her mistress,

\* When a man is dead, and particularly when he has been assassinated, his body is placed upon a table, and the women of his family, or, in their stead, friends or even strangers well known for their poetic talent, improvise, in presence of a numerous audience, versified dirges in the dialect of the country. These women are called *voceratrici*, or, according to the Corsican pronunciation, *buceratrici*, and their song is called *vocero*, *buceru*, *bucerasu*, on the eastern, and *ballata* on the western, coast of the island. The word *vocero*, with



was as curious as herself; and, before Miss Lydia could prevent her, she said to Orso:

"Will you have the kindness to tell me, sir, what is the meaning of giving the *rimbecco*?"

"The *rimbecco*!" said Orso; "why it is to insult a Corsican mortally, to reproach him for not having taken his revenge on his enemy. But who has been talking to you about *rimbecco*?"\*

"Yesterday, at Marseilles," hurriedly replied Miss Lydia, "the captain of the schooner mentioned the word."

"Of whom was he speaking?" asked Orso, quickly.

"Oh! he was telling an old story—of the time of—yes, I think it had reference to Vannina d'Ornano."

"The death of Vannina, I suppose, Miss

its derivatives *vocerar*, *voceratrice*, comes from the Latin *vociferare*. Sometimes several women improvise in turn, and frequently the wife or daughter of the dead man sings the funeral dirge.

\* *Rimbeccare* in Italian signifies to send back, to retort, to reject. In the Corsican dialect, it means to give an offensive and public insult. The *rimbecco* is given to the son of a murdered man by telling him that his father is not avenged. The *rimbecco* is a kind of stimulative reproach to a man who had not yet washed out an injury in blood. The law of Genoa enacted very severe penalties against the author of a *rimbecco*.

Nevil, did not inspire you with much affection for our hero, the brave Sampiero?"

"But do you think his conduct was very heroic?"

"His crime finds its excuse in the rude manners of the time. And, besides, Sampiero was waging a deadly war against the Genoese; what confidence could his countrymen have placed in him, if he had not punished her who sought to treat with Genoa?"

"Vannina," said the sailor, "went without her husband's permission. Sampiero did right to strangle her."

"But," said Miss Lydia, "it was to save her husband, out of love for him, that she went to seek his pardon from the Genoese."

"To seek his pardon was to disgrace him!" cried Orso.

"And to kill her himself!" pursued Miss Nevil. "What a monster he must have been!"

"You know that it was her own request that she should die by his hand. But do you consider Othello to have been a monster also, Miss Nevil?"

"That was quite another thing! he was jealous. Sampiero was actuated by vanity alone."

"And is not jealousy a species of vanity?"

It is the vanity of love; and, perhaps, you excuse it on account of its motive?"

Miss Lydia looked at him with great dignity, and, turning to the sailor, inquired when the schooner would reach Ajaccio.

"On the day after to-morrow," he replied, "if this wind continues."

"I wish we were there already," said Miss Lydia, "for I am tired of this vessel."

Hereupon she rose, and, taking the arm of her waiting-maid, began to walk up and down the deck. Orso remained standing by the tiller, not knowing whether he ought to walk with her, or to cease a conversation which she appeared to dislike.

"A pretty girl, by the blood of the Madonna!" said the sailor; "if all the fleas in my bed were like her, I wouldn't mind being bitten."

Miss Lydia, perhaps, heard this singular compliment, and was alarmed by it, for she went down to her cabin almost immediately. Soon afterwards, Orso retired also. As soon as he had left the deck, the waiting-maid made her appearance, and subjected the sailor to a lengthened cross-questioning, the result of which she thus communicated to her mistress:

“The *ballata* which Orso’s arrival had broken off, had been composed on the occasion of the death of Colonel della Rebbia, his father, who had been assassinated two years before. The sailor did not doubt but that Orso was returning to Corsica, to *do vengeance*, as he said, and affirmed that before long *fresh meat* would be seen in the village of Pietranera. In plain terms, his opinion was that Signor Orso proposed to assassinate two or three persons suspected of having murdered his father, who had been brought to trial for the offence, but had been proved perfectly innocent, because they had bribed both judge and lawyers, prefect and gendarmes. ‘There is no justice to be had in Corsica,’ said the sailor, ‘and I trust more to a good gun than to any counsellor of the royal court. When a man has an enemy, he must choose between the three S’s.’ ” \*

This interesting information effected a notable change in Miss Lydia’s manners and feelings towards Lieutenant della Rebbia. He was henceforward a personage of importance in the eyes of the romantic English girl. His careless air, his frankness and good-humour, which

\* A common expression in Corsica, referring to *schioppetto*, *stiletto*, and *strada*—gun, dagger, and flight.

had at first produced an unfavourable impression, now constituted an additional recommendation; for she regarded them as the profound dissimulation of an energetic soul, determined not to manifest outwardly the feelings which held sway within his breast. Orso appeared to be a sort of Fiesco, concealing vast designs under an appearance of levity; and although it is less noble to shoot a few rascals than to deliver one's fatherland, yet a thorough vengeance is a fine thing; and the ladies like a hero all the better for not being a politician. Then only Miss Nevil remarked that the young lieutenant had very expressive eyes, white teeth, a good figure, a finished education, and elegant manners. She frequently spoke to him during the next day, and was much interested by his conversation. He had left Corsica when quite young, to go first to college, and afterwards to a military school; and his native land was still clothed with poetic colours in his mind. He grew animated while speaking of its mountains and forests, and of the primitive customs of its inhabitants. As we may readily believe, the word *vengeance* occurred more than once during his narrative; for it is impossible to speak of the Corsicans

without either attacking or justifying their proverbial passion. Orso rather surprised Miss Nevil by condemning, in general terms, the interminable animosities of his countrymen. He endeavoured, nevertheless, to make some excuse for the peasants, by saying that the vendetta was the duel of the poor. "This is so true," he said, "that no one is assassinated until he has received a regular defiance. 'Guard thyself, I am on my guard,' are the sacramental words which two enemies exchange before laying ambushes for each other. There are more assassinations in our island," he added, "than anywhere else; but never will you find an ignoble motive for these crimes. There are many murderers amongst us, it is true, but not one robber."

Whenever he uttered the words *vengeance* and *murder*, Miss Lydia watched him narrowly, but could not discern the least trace of emotion upon his countenance. As she had predetermined that he possessed the strength of mind necessary to render himself impenetrable to all eyes, except her own, she continued firmly to believe that the ashes of Colonel della Rebbia would not long be denied the satisfaction which they claimed.

The schooner was now in sight of Corsica. The Captain named the principal points along the coast; and, although they were all perfectly unknown to Miss Lydia, she was pleased to learn their names. Nothing is more tiresome than an anonymous landscape. Sometimes the Colonel's telescope enabled them to perceive some islander, in his dress of brown cloth, armed with a long gun, and mounted on a small horse, galloping along the slopes. Miss Lydia thought every such person was a bandit, or else a son going to avenge his father's death; but Orso assured her that it was some peaceful inhabitant of the neighbouring town travelling on business, and that he carried a gun less from necessity than from a desire to be fashionable, just as a dandy never walks out without an elegant cane. Although a gun is a less noble and less poetical weapon than a stiletto, Miss Lydia thought it was a better thing for a man to carry than a cane, and remembered that all Lord Byron's heroes die by a bullet, and not by the classic dagger.

After three days' sailing, they arrived off the Sanguinaires, and the magnificent panorama of the Gulf of Ajaccio spread out before the eyes of the travellers. It has been with justice com-

pared to the Bay of Naples ; and at the moment when the schooner entered the port, a copse on fire, covering the Punta di Girato with smoke, reminded them of Vesuvius, and added to the resemblance. To make it complete, however, it would be necessary for an Attila's army to lay waste the environs of Naples ; for all the neighbourhood of Ajaccio is a bleak desert. Instead of those elegant fabrics which meet the eye on all sides from Castellamare to Cape Miseno, nothing is to be seen, around the Gulf of Ajaccio, but sombre forests backed by barren mountains. Not a villa, not a single habitation of any kind can be discerned ; here and there, on the heights around the town, a few isolated white buildings are perceptible—these are funereal chapels, family tombs. The whole character of the landscape is one of grave and melancholy beauty.

The aspect of the town, at the period of which we write, added largely to the mournful impression produced by the solitude of its vicinity. There was no activity in the streets ; day after day you might walk out, seeing only the same handful of people. No women are to be seen, except a few peasants who have come to sell their wares. You hear no one



speaking loud, laughing, or singing, as in the Italian towns. Sometimes, under the shade of a tree on the public promenade, you might see a dozen armed peasants playing at cards, or looking on. They never cry out, never dispute; if the game becomes animated, you hear the crack of a pistol, which invariably precedes the utterance of threats. The Corsican is naturally grave and taciturn. In the evening, a few persons come out to enjoy the fresh air, but the promenaders are almost all foreigners. The islanders remain sitting at their doors; every one seems on the watch, like a falcon on its nest.

## CHAPTER IV.

AFTER having visited the house in which Napoleon was born, and procured, by means more or less orthodox, a little of the tapestry paper, Miss Lydia, on the second day after her arrival in Corsica, was beset by feelings of the deepest melancholy, which must be the case with every stranger who comes to a country whose unsociable habits seem to condemn visitors to complete isolation. She bitterly regretted her hasty caprice ; but by leaving immediately, she would have compromised her reputation as a courageous traveller ; Miss Lydia therefore resigned herself to her fate as patiently as might be, and determined to kill time as best she could. In pursuance of this noble resolution, she prepared her pencils and colours, sketched some views of the gulf, and painted the portrait of a sunburnt melon-vendor, with a white beard

and the most ferociously wicked look in the world. As these occupations did not suffice to amuse her, she resolved to lay siege to the heart of the descendant of the corporals,—which was not a very difficult task, as, far from being in a hurry to return to his native village, Orso seemed to have taken a liking to Ajaccio, although he had met no friends there. Miss Lydia had, moreover, conceived the praiseworthy design of civilizing this mountain bear, and making him renounce the sinister intentions which had brought him to the island. Ever since she had taken the pains to study his character, she had come to the conviction that it would be a pity to let the young man rush to his destruction, and that it would be a glorious thing for her to convert a Corsican.

The following was the manner in which our travellers passed their days:—In the morning, the Colonel and Orso went out shooting; Miss Lydia sketched, or wrote to her friends that she might have the pleasure of dating her letters from Ajaccio. At about six o'clock the gentlemen returned, laden with game; dinner was served, after which Miss Lydia sang, the Colonel went to sleep, and the young people remained talking together until a late hour.

Some formality connected with his passport had obliged Colonel Nevil to pay a visit to the Prefect of the town ; and this worthy, who, like most of his colleagues, found life very dull in Ajaccio, had been delighted to hear of the arrival of a rich Englishman, who was a man of the world, and the father of a pretty daughter. He had therefore received him with great politeness, and overwhelmed him with offers of service ; nay more, a very few days after, he had returned his visit. The Colonel, who had just risen from table, was lying comfortably upon the sofa, just ready to go to sleep ; his daughter was singing before a dilapidated piano ; Orso was turning over the leaves of her music, and admiring the white shoulders and silken hair of the songstress. The Prefect was announced ; the music ceased ; the Colonel rose, rubbed his eyes, and introduced his daughter. " I do not introduce M. della Rebbia," he added, " for you doubtless know him."

" The son of Colonel della Rebbia ?" inquired the Prefect, with some little embarrassment.

" Yes, sir," answered Orso.

" I had the honour of being acquainted with your father ; and am glad to meet the son of so distinguished an officer."

The common topics of conversation were soon exhausted. Notwithstanding his efforts, the Colonel yawned frequently ; as a liberal in politics, Orso would not speak to a satellite of monarchical power ; Miss Lydia alone kept up the conversation. The Prefect, on his part, did not allow it to languish, and he was evidently delighted to chat about Paris and the world with a lady who knew all the notabilities of European society. From time to time, even while he was speaking, he looked at Orso with singular curiosity.

"I presume you made M. della Rebbia's acquaintance on the Continent," said he to Miss Lydia.

Miss Lydia replied, with some embarrassment, that she had met him for the first time on board the vessel which had brought them to Corsica.

"He appears a very gentlemanly young man," said the Prefect in a low voice. "Did he tell you," he continued in a still lower tone, "what was his reason for returning to Corsica?"

"I did not inquire," replied Miss Lydia, majestically. "You can ask him now."

The Prefect kept silence ; but a moment

after, hearing Orso speak a few words to the Colonel in English, he said, "You have travelled a great deal, sir, if I may judge from your knowledge of languages. You must have forgotten Corsica and its customs."

"It is true; I was very young when I left the island."

"Do you still belong to the army?"

"I am on half-pay, sir."

"You have served so long in the French army, that I suppose you must have become quite a Frenchman." The Prefect pronounced these words with a marked emphasis.

Now, it is no great compliment to the Corsicans, to remind them that they belong to the French nation. They desire to be considered a separate people, and their actions justify this claim so thoroughly that it is generally granted them. Orso was rather piqued by the Prefect's remarks, and said: "Do you think, sir, that, to be a man of honour, a Corsican needs to serve in the French army?"

"Certainly not," answered the Prefect; "I had no such thought, I was only referring to certain *customs* of this country, some of which are not exactly such as a magistrate would wish to see."

He laid great stress upon the word *customs*, and assumed as serious an expression of countenance as he could. Soon after, he rose and took his leave, after obtaining a promise from Miss Lydia that she would call upon his wife.

When he was gone: "Well," said Miss Lydia, "by coming to Corsica, I have learned what a Prefect is. This one seems a nice sort of man."

"He did not impress me very favourably," said Orso. "I thought his emphatic tone and mysterious air were very singular."

The Colonel was more than half asleep; Miss Lydia glanced towards him, and, lowering her voice, said to Orso: "I do not think him so mysterious as you say he was; for I fancy I understood what he meant."

"You are really very clear-sighted, Miss Nevil," said Orso; "and if you see any meaning in what he said, you must assuredly have supplied it yourself."

"That is a very worn-out compliment, M. della Rebbia; but shall I give you a proof of my penetration? I am somewhat of a sorceress, and when I have seen a person twice, I generally know what are his thoughts."

"Really, Miss Nevil, you alarm me. If you can read my thoughts, I don't know whether I ought to be pleased or sorry."

"M. della Rebbia," continued Miss Lydia, blushing, "we have only known each other for a few days; but at sea, and in a barbarous country,—you will excuse the epithet, I hope,—in a barbarous country, persons become friends more quickly than in the civilized world. Therefore, don't be astonished if I speak to you as a friend, about private matters, with which a stranger has, perhaps, no right to meddle."

"Oh! do not use that word, Miss Nevil; the other pleased me much better."

"Well, sir, I must tell you that, without having sought to learn your secrets, I have heard some of them, and am grieved by them. I am aware of the misfortune which has fallen upon your family; I have heard much about the vindictive character of your countrymen, and their method of avenging injuries. Was it not to this that the Prefect alluded?"

"Can you believe it, Miss Nevil?"—And Orso became pale as death.

"No, M. della Rebbia," she said, interrupting him; "I know you to be a gentleman of



the highest honour. You have yourself told me that none but the common people in your island practised the *vendetta*, which you are pleased to call a species of duel."

"Do you then believe me capable of ever becoming an assassin?"

"As I have mentioned the subject, sir, you must clearly see that I do not suspect you; and if I have spoken to you on the matter," she continued, casting down her eyes, "it was because I thought that, now you have returned to your country, and will be surrounded perhaps by barbarous prejudices, you might be glad to know that there are some who esteem you for your courage in resisting them. But come," she said, raising her head, "let us say no more on this unpleasant topic; it gives me the head-ache, and besides, it is very late. You are not angry with me, I hope. Good night, in the English fashion." And she gave him her hand. Orso pressed it seriously and gratefully.

"Miss Nevil," he said, "do you know that there are times when the instinct of my country awakes within me. Sometimes, when I think of my poor father, then dreadful thoughts attack me. Thanks to you, I am now freed from them for ever."

He was about to continue, but Miss Lydia dropped a teaspoon, and the noise woke the Colonel.

“Della Rebbia!” he exclaimed, starting up, “we start at five o’clock to-morrow morning. Be punctual.”

“Yes, Colonel.”

## CHAPTER V.

ON the following day, a short time before the sportsmen returned, Miss Nevil, who had been rambling on the sea-shore with her maid, was walking homewards, when her attention was attracted by a young woman, dressed in black, and mounted on a small but vigorous horse, who had just entered the town, followed by a servant on horseback, in a brown coat somewhat out at elbows, with a gourd hanging from his shoulder-belt and a pistol in his girdle; while his hand held a gun, the butt-end of which was fixed in a leathern pocket fastened to his saddle-bow; in short, he was in the complete costume of a melodramatic brigand, or of a Corsican peasant on a journey. The remarkable beauty of the young woman induced Miss Nevil to notice her particularly. She was tall and fair-complexioned, with eyes

of deep blue, a rosy mouth, and teeth of pearly whiteness. The expression of her countenance betokened pride, anxiety, and sorrow. Her head was covered by a veil of black silk, called a *mezzaro*, which the Genoese introduced into Corsica, and which is very becoming. Long tresses of chestnut hair formed a sort of turban around her head. Her dress was scrupulously neat, and characterized by the greatest simplicity.

Miss Nevil had plenty of time to observe her, for she stopped in the street to question some one with great interest, judging from the expression of her eyes; as soon as she had received an answer, she struck her horse with her riding-whip, and rode off at full speed to the hotel where Sir Thomas Nevil and Orso had taken up their abode. After having exchanged a few words with the landlord, she leapt lightly from the saddle, and sat down on a stone bench by the gateway, whilst her attendant led the horses to the stable. Miss Lydia, in her Parisian costume, passed by her, but she did not raise her eyes; and when, a quarter of an hour afterwards, she opened her window, she still saw the lady in the *mezzaro* sitting in the same place and in the same

attitude. Soon the Colonel and Orso appeared, on their return from their hunting expedition. The landlord then whispered a few words to the young lady, and pointed out Della Rebbia with his finger. She blushed, rose up quickly from her seat, walked a few steps forward, and then stopped, as though afraid to proceed. Orso stood near her, watching her movements with curiosity.

“Are you Orso Antonio della Rebbia?” she said, in a broken voice; “for I am Colomba.”

“Colomba!” cried Orso, clasping her in his arms, and kissing her affectionately—which rather astonished the Colonel and his daughter, for it is not customary in England to kiss in the street.

“Brother,” said Colomba, “you will forgive me for having come without your permission; but our friends told me that you had arrived, and it is such a consolation for me to see you.”

Orso embraced her again; and then turning to the Colonel, said: “Allow me to present to you my sister Colomba, whom I should never have recognized if she had not announced herself. I am sure your kindness will excuse

me, but I cannot have the honour of dining with you to-day. My sister——”

“But where, in the name of fortune, do you intend to dine, my dear fellow?” exclaimed the Colonel. “You well know that there is only one dinner prepared in this wretched inn, and that dinner is for us. My daughter would be delighted if Mademoiselle Colomba would join us.”

Colomba looked at her brother, who offered no opposition, and all three went into the largest room in the inn, which served as the Colonel's sitting-room and dining-room. On being introduced to Miss Nevil, Mademoiselle della Rebbia made a low curtsy, but did not speak a word. She was evidently very much frightened, and seemed to have been brought, for the first time, into the society of strangers who were people of the world. There was nothing provincial in her manners, however; her native elegance preserved her from awkwardness. Miss Nevil was delighted with her on this account; and as there was not a decent room in the hotel unoccupied by the Colonel and his suite, Miss Lydia carried her condescension or curiosity so far as to offer to have a bed prepared for Mademoiselle della

Rebbia in her own room. Colomba stammered a few words of thanks and hastened to follow Miss Nevil's maid, to make such toilette arrangements as were rendered necessary by a journey on horseback through the dust and heat.

On returning to the dining-room, she stopped in front of the Colonel's guns, which the sportsmen had placed in a corner of the room. "What beautiful guns!" she said. "Are they yours, brother?"

"No, they are the Colonel's English guns; and they are as good as beautiful," replied Orso.

"I wish you had one like them," said Colomba.

"Oh! one of those three certainly belongs to Della Rebbia," exclaimed the Colonel. "He knows how to use it properly. He fired fourteen times to-day, and each time hit his mark."

A conflict of generosity now ensued, in which Orso was vanquished, to the great satisfaction of his sister, as it was easy to perceive by the expression of infantine delight which suddenly illumined her usually serious countenance.

"Choose, my dear fellow," said the Colonel. Orso refused.

"Then your sister shall choose for you."

Colomba required no further asking; she selected the least ornamented of the three guns, but it was an excellent Manton of large bore. "It will carry a ball a long way," she said.

Her brother hardly knew how to express his thanks, when dinner appeared very opportunely to relieve him from his embarrassment. Miss Lydia was rejoiced to perceive that Colomba, who had at first declined to join them at table and had only yielded at a look from her brother, made the sign of the Cross, like a good Catholic, before she began to eat. "Well!" she said, "this is primitive;" and she began to anticipate deriving more than one interesting observation from this young representative of the ancient manners of Corsica. Orso was evidently rather ill at ease, fearing doubtless that his sister would say or do something which would proclaim her village education. But Colomba kept her eyes fixed upon him, and regulated all her movements by those of her brother. Sometimes she looked steadily at him with a strange expression of



melancholy, and on these occasions, if Orso's eyes happened to meet hers, he was the first to withdraw his gaze, as if he were desirous to avoid answering a question which his sister mentally asked him, and which he understood only too well. The conversation was carried on in French, for the Colonel knew very little Italian. Colomba understood French when spoken, and could even pronounce without much difficulty the few words which she was forced to exchange with her host and hostess.

After dinner, the Colonel, who had remarked the constraint which subsisted between the brother and sister, asked Orso, with his usual frankness, if he would not like to be left alone with Mademoiselle Colomba, and offered to go into the adjoining room with his daughter. But Orso hastily thanked him for his kindness, and said they would have plenty of time to chat together at Pietranera—the village where his family resided. Upon this, the Colonel took his accustomed place on the sofa; and Miss Nevil, after having tried several subjects of conversation, gave up the idea of making the beautiful Colomba talk, and requested Orso to read something from Dante, her favourite poet. Orso chose the

episode of Francesca da Rimini, and began to read in his best style those sublime verses which so admirably express the danger of two persons reading a love-story together. As he read, Colomba drew nearer the table, and raised her head; her dilated eye-balls sparkled with unwonted fire; she blushed and grew pale by turns, and moved convulsively on her chair. Her sensitive Italian organization had no need of a pedant to point out to her the beauties of true poetry.

When her brother had finished reading:—  
“How beautiful that is!” she cried. “Who wrote it, Orso?”

Orso was rather disconcerted by this question, but Miss Lydia answered with a smile that the author was a Florentine poet, who had been dead for several hundred years.

“You shall read Dante,” said Orso, “when we are at Pietranera.”

“But is it not splendid poetry?” said Colomba; and she began to repeat, in a low voice, two or three stanzas which she had remembered. Afterwards, growing animated, she declaimed them aloud, with greater expression than her brother had used in reading them.

"You appear to be enthusiastically fond of poetry," said Miss Lydia, in great astonishment. "How I envy you the delight of reading Dante for the first time!"

"You see, Miss Nevil," said Orso, "how powerfully Dante's verses can excite a wild little girl who knows hardly anything besides her paternoster. But I mistake; Colomba is a poet herself. When quite a child, she was continually making verses, and my father wrote me word that she was the best *voceratrice* in Pietranera and its neighbourhood."

Colomba glanced at her brother with an imploring look. Miss Nevil had been told of the Corsican improvisatrices, and was dying to hear one: she accordingly besought Colomba to give her a specimen of her powers. Orso now interposed, very much vexed at having mentioned the poetical talents of his sister. In vain did he declare that nothing could be poorer than a Corsican ballata, and protest that it was an act of treason to his country to listen to Corsican verses after reading Dante; his excuses only increased Miss Nevil's curiosity, and he was at last compelled to say to his sister: "Well, as Miss Nevil wishes it, Colomba, improvise something, but let it be short."

Colomba sighed, looked steadfastly at the table-cloth and ceiling for a few moments, and then, covering her eyes with her hand, like those birds which think themselves unseen when their eyes are closed, she sang, or rather declaimed, in a sweet but trembling voice, the following serenata :

THE YOUNG GIRL AND THE RINGDOVE.

“In the valley very far behind the mountains,—the sun comes thither only for one hour in the day.—In the valley there is a dark house,—and the grass grows on its threshold.—Doors and windows are always closed.—No smoke escapes from the roof.—But at noon, when the sun shines,—then a window opens,—and the orphan girl sits there,—spinning at her wheel.—She spins, and sings as she works—a song of sadness.—But no other song answers to hers.—One day, one day in spring,—a ringdove perched on a neighbouring tree,—and heard the song of the young girl.—Young girl, she said, thou weep’st not alone :—A cruel sparrowhawk has robbed me of my mate.—Ringdove, show me the cruel sparrowhawk ;—even were he as high as the clouds,—I will soon have brought him down to earth.—But as for

me, poor girl, who will restore to me my brother,—my brother now in a distant land?—Young girl, tell me where is thy brother—and my wings shall bear me to his side.”

“What a very obliging ringdove,” cried Orso, embracing his sister with an emotion which contrasted strongly with his assumed tone of pleasantry.

“Your song is charming,” said Miss Lydia; “I wish you would write it in my album for me. I will translate it into English, and have it set to music.”

The kind-hearted Colonel, who had not understood a word of it, added his compliments to those of his daughter.

Miss Nevil brought her album, and was not a little surprised to see the improvisatrice write out her song in a very singular manner. Instead of being written in separate lines, the verses followed each other on the same line, as far as the width of the sheet would allow, so that they did not at all accord with the ordinary definition of poetical compositions:—short lines, of unequal length, with a margin on each side. There was something capricious, also, about Mademoiselle Colomba’s orthogra-

phy, which, more than once, made Miss Nevil smile, whilst Orso's fraternal vanity was on the rack.

Bedtime had now arrived, and the two young ladies retired to their room. Whilst Miss Lydia was taking off her necklaces, brooches, and bracelets, she observed her companion draw from under her dress something long, like a busk, but of a very different shape. Colomba placed it carefully and quietly upon a table, covering it with her mezzaro; and then knelt down, and said her prayers devoutly. Two minutes after, she was in bed. Naturally very inquisitive, and as slow as Englishwomen always are in undressing, Miss Lydia walked to the table, and under pretence of looking for a pin, lifted up the mezzaro, and perceived a stiletto of considerable length, curiously mounted in mother-of-pearl and silver; the workmanship was remarkably good, and it was very valuable as a specimen of ancient armour.

"Is it the custom here," said Miss Nevil, with a smile, "for young ladies to carry these little instruments about them?"

"It is necessary to do so," replied Colomba, with a sigh. "There are so many wicked people."

"And would you really have the courage to strike a blow like that?" said Miss Nevil, taking the stiletto in her hand, and making a cut downwards, in true theatrical style.

"Yes, if it were necessary," said Colomba, in her sweet and musical voice, "to defend myself or protect my friends. But you should not hold the dagger in that way; you might wound yourself, if the person whom you wished to strike were to step backwards. That is the way to strike," she continued, making a pass with the weapon. "Such a blow is always mortal, it is said. Happy they who have no need of such arms!"

She sighed deeply, laid her head upon the pillow, and closed her eyes. It would be impossible to imagine a head more beautiful, more noble, more virginal than was hers in repose. Phidias, when sculpturing his Minerva, would not have desired a better model.

## CHAPTER VI.

IN conformity to the precept laid down by Horace, I have plunged at once *in medias res*. But now that all my personages are asleep, I shall take the opportunity to inform my readers of certain particulars, with which it is necessary for him to be acquainted, if he wishes to penetrate further into this veracious history. They are already aware that Colonel della Rebbia, Orso's father, had been assassinated. Now, murders are not committed in Corsica as they are in France, by the first escaped galley-slave, who can find no better means of robbing you of your valuables ; Corsicans are assassinated by their enemies, but why they have enemies it is frequently very difficult to say. Many families hate each other from ancient custom, even after they have completely forgotten the original cause of their mutual hatred.



The family to which Colonel della Rebbia belonged hated several other families, but especially that of the Barricini. Some said that, during the sixteenth century, a Della Rebbia had seduced a Barricini, and had afterwards been murdered by a relative of the outraged maiden: but others related the affair differently, asserting that a Della Rebbia had been seduced, and a Barricini put to death for the offence. At all events, to use an expressive phrase, there was blood between the two houses. Contrary to custom, however, this murder had not occasioned others; this arose from the persecution to which both families were subjected by the Genoese government, which forced the young men to expatriate themselves, and thus deprived the two houses, for several generations, of their active representatives. At the end of the last century, a Della Rebbia, an officer in the Neapolitan service, happening to be in a gaming-house, had a quarrel with some other officers, who called him "a Corsican goatherd," and other insulting names; he laid his hand to his sword, but being only one against three, the odds would have been sadly against him, if a stranger, who was playing in the same room, had not called out, "I am a Corsican also,"

and hastened to his defence. This stranger was a Barricini, totally unacquainted with his fellow-countryman. Mutual explanations ensued; there was profusion of politeness, and pledges of eternal friendship on both sides; for, on the Continent, the Corsicans are the best friends in the world; in their own island, it is quite the contrary. As long as they remained in Italy, Della Rebbia and Barricini were intimate friends, but when they returned to Corsica they saw each other but rarely, although they both lived in the same village; and when they died it was said they had not spoken together for five or six years. Their sons lived, like them, *in etiquette*, as the saying is in Corsica. One of them, Ghilfuccio, the father of Orso, entered the army; the other, Giudice Barricini, was a lawyer. Each became, in time, the head of his family; and being separated by their professions, they seldom had occasion to see or hear of each other.

One day, however, in the year 1809, Giudice was at Bastia, and read in a newspaper that Captain Ghilfuccio had been promoted; upon which he said, in the presence of witnesses, that he was not surprised at it, for General ——— protected his family. This saying was repeated

to Ghilfuccio at Vienna, and he said to a fellow-countryman that on his return to Corsica he should find Giudice very rich, because he won more money by the causes which he lost than by those which he gained. It was never ascertained whether he meant to insinuate by this that the lawyer cheated his clients, or whether he merely intended the trivial observation that a complicated affair was more profitable to a man of law than a good cause. However this may be, lawyer Barricini was informed of the epigram, and did not forget it. In 1812 he was desirous to be appointed mayor of his commune, and had every expectation of gaining his wish, when General — wrote to the Prefect, recommending a relative of Ghilfuccio's wife to the vacant office; the Prefect at once complied with the General's desire, and Barricini felt convinced that he owed his disappointment to the intrigues of Ghilfuccio. On the fall of the Emperor, in 1814, the General's *protégé* was denounced as a Bonapartist, and replaced by Barricini, who, in his turn, was deposed during the hundred days. When that tempest had blown over, however, he resumed possession of the insignia of his office with great pomp and satisfaction.

From this time forth his star shone more brightly than ever. Colonel della Rebbia retired on his half-pay to Pietranera ; and was subjected by him to a series of petty, but most provoking annoyances. At one time he was adjudged to pay a considerable fine for damages committed by his horse in the mayor's paddock ; on another occasion the mayor, under the pretext of repairing the pavement of the church, removed a broken stone, sculptured with the arms of Della Rebbia, which covered the tomb of one of the members of his family. If the goats devoured the Colonel's young plants, the owners of the offending animals were sure to find protection from the mayor ; and finally, the grocer who kept the post-office at Pietranera, and an old soldier who acted as constable, both of whom were clients of Della Rebbia, were deprived of their offices, and superseded by creatures of Barricini.

Sometime after, the Colonel's wife died, expressing a wish to be interred in the midst of a little copse where she was in the habit of taking a daily walk. The mayor immediately declared that she must be buried in the grave-yard of the commune, as he had received no authority to permit an isolated burial. The Co-

lonel passionately declared that, with or without authority, his wife should be buried in the place which she had chosen ; and a grave was dug accordingly. The mayor, on his side, ordered another to be dug in the public cemetery, and sent for some gendarmes, in order, he said, that the law might have force on its side. On the day of the funeral the two parties met, and it was feared that they would come to blows for the possession of the corpse of Madame della Rebbia. Some forty peasants, well armed, served as an escort to the relatives of the deceased, and compelled the priest, on leaving the church, to take the road which led to the wood ; while, on the other hand, the mayor appeared with his two sons, his clients, and the gendarmes, to prevent any such step being taken. When he bade the procession turn back, he was received with threats and execrations : numbers were on the side of his adversaries, who were resolved to proceed. Several guns were levelled at the mayor, and it is said that one shepherd cocked his piece and was about to fire, but the Colonel prevented him, saying, "Let no one fire without my order !" The mayor, like Panurge, "was naturally afraid of blows ;" so he declined battle,

and withdrew with his escort: the funeral procession then continued its course, choosing the longest road, so as to pass in front of the mayor's residence. As they passed it, an idiot, who formed one of the party, shouted out, *Vive l'Empereur!* Two or three others joined in the cry, and the Rebbianists becoming more and more excited, proposed to kill one of the mayor's oxen, which they happened to pass on their road. Fortunately the Colonel prevented this act of violence.

It will be readily imagined that a full report of this was drawn up in the mayor's sublimest style, and forwarded to the Prefect. The laws of heaven and earth had, he said, been trampled under foot—the majesty of government, as represented in the persons of the mayor and the priest, had been disregarded and insulted—and Colonel della Rebbia had placed himself at the head of a Bonapartist plot, for the purpose of changing the order of succession to the Throne: and had excited the citizens to take up arms against each other,—both which offences were rendered penal by the 86th and 91st articles of the criminal code.

The exaggerated manner in which the complaint was made destroyed its effect. The

Colonel wrote to the Prefect and the Crown-lawyers; a relation of his wife was connected with one of the deputies of the island, and another was cousin of the President of the Royal Court. Thanks to the protection of these powerful friends, the plot vanished, Madame della Rebbia remained unmolested in her grave, and the only sufferer was the idiot, who was sent to prison for a fortnight.

Lawyer Barricini, very ill satisfied with the result of this affair, now changed the nature of his attack. He exhumed some old title-deeds, in reliance upon which he contested the Colonel's right to a certain water-course, which turned a mill. A protracted lawsuit was the consequence. After it had lasted a year, the Court was about to give judgment, to all appearance, in favour of the Colonel, when M. Barricini placed in the hands of the authorities a letter signed by a celebrated bandit, named Agostini, threatening him, the mayor, with conflagration and death, if he did not abandon his pretensions. It is well-known that in Corsica the protection of a bandit is very much sought after, and that they frequently interfere in private quarrels to oblige their friends. This letter told in the mayor's

favour, but a fresh incident occurred to complicate the affair. The bandit Agostini wrote to complain that his signature had been counterfeited, and that a slur had been cast upon his character, by representing him as a man who made merchandize of his influence. "If I discover the forger," he said, at the end of his letter, "I will punish him condignly."

It was now clear that Agostini had not written the threatening letter to the mayor; but Della Rebbia accused Barricini of having done so, and *vice versa*. Menaces were employed by both parties, and the judges were utterly unable to decide which of them was guilty.

While matters were in this state, Colonel Ghilfuccio was assassinated. The circumstances of his death were thus stated in the court of justice: On the 2nd of August, 18—, at nightfall, a woman who was carrying some corn to Pietranera, heard two shots fired in rapid succession, as it appeared to her, in a narrow lane leading to the village, about fifty yards from the place where she was. Almost immediately afterwards, she saw a man running along towards the village, behind a plantation of vines. He stopped for a moment, and looked back; but he was too far off for the woman



Pietri to distinguish his features, especially as he had a vine-leaf in his mouth, which concealed nearly all his face. He beckoned with his hand to a comrade whom the witness did not see, and then disappeared among the vines.

Madeleine Pietri dropped her bundle, ran up the lane, and found Colonel della Rebbia weltering in his blood, pierced with two musket-balls, but still breathing. Near him lay his gun, loaded and cocked, as though he had assumed a posture of defence against some person who was attacking him in front, whilst another shot him from behind. He was in the agony of death, struggling violently, but unable to utter a word, which the physicians accounted for by the nature of his wounds—a ball having transpierced his lung. In vain did Madeleine Pietri raise him up, and ask him who was his murderer. She saw that he was anxious to speak, but could not, for he was choking with blood. She remarked that he attempted to put his hand in his pocket, and she immediately took out his pocket-book, which she gave to him open. The wounded man took the pencil, and endeavoured to write. The witness, indeed, observed him form a few letters with great

difficulty; but as she was unable to read, she could not understand their meaning. Exhausted by this effort, the Colonel placed the pocket-book in Madeleine Pietri's hand, which he pressed forcibly, looking at her in a singular manner, as much as to say (to use the witness's own words), "That is important! it is the name of my assassin!"

Madeleine Pietri was returning to the village when she met Mayor Barricini and his son Vincentello. It was then nearly night. She related what she had seen. The Mayor took the pocket-book, and ran home to put on his official scarf, and to summon his secretary and the gendarmes. Left alone with young Vincentello, Madeleine Pietri proposed that they should go together to assist the Colonel in case he were still alive; but Vincentello answered that if he went near a man who had been the deadly enemy of his family, people would not fail to accuse him of having murdered him. Shortly after, the Mayor arrived, found the Colonel dead, had the body conveyed home, and drew up his report.

Though his nerves were naturally very much shaken by what had occurred, M. Barricini lost no time in sealing up the Colonel's pocket-

book, and made every effort in his power to gain some traces of the murderer; but no discovery of any importance was made. When the Judge arrived, the pocket-book was opened, and upon a page soiled with blood were legibly inscribed, though with a trembling hand, these few letters—*Agosti*. The Judge had not the least doubt that the Colonel wished to point out Agostini as his assassin. When Colomba della Rebbia, however, was brought into court, she requested permission to examine the pocket-book. After she had turned the leaves carefully over for some time, she pointed to the Mayor, and exclaimed, "Behold the assassin!" Then, with a clearness and precision that astonished all who had beheld her passionate transports of grief, she stated that her father had received a letter from his son a few days previously to his death, and had burned it; but before doing so, he had written in his pocket-book, with a pencil, the address of Orso, who had just been transferred to another garrison. Now this address was not to be found in the pocket-book, and Colomba concluded that the Mayor had torn out the leaf on which it was written, because it corresponded with that upon which her father had traced the name of his

murderer; and for this name, said Colomba, the Mayor had substituted that of Agostini. The Judge took the pocket-book, and observed that a leaf had really been torn out; but soon he perceived that other leaves were wanting in other parts of the book, and witnesses deposed that the Colonel was in the habit of tearing out pages for the purpose of lighting his cigar; nothing was more likely than that he had burned, by mistake, the leaf on which the address had been copied. Moreover, it was proved that the Mayor, after having received the pocket-book from Madeleine Pietri, could not have read anything, because of the darkness of the night; and other witnesses deposed that he had not stopped a moment before going to his house, that the sergeant of gendarmes had accompanied him thither, had seen him light a lamp, put the pocket-book into an envelope, and seal it in his presence.

When the sergeant had finished his deposition, Colomba, beside herself with grief, fell on her knees before him, and adjured him, by all that he held most sacred, to say whether he had not left the Mayor for a single moment. The sergeant was evidently moved by the agitation of the young girl, and confessed,

after some hesitation, that he had gone into an adjoining room to get a large sheet of paper, but that he had not been away a minute, and that the Mayor had spoken to him all the time, whilst he was feeling for the paper in a drawer. On his return, he said, he found the bloody pocket-book on the table, in the very place where the Mayor had thrown it on entering the room.

M. Barricini gave his evidence with the greatest calmness. He could excuse, he said, Mademoiselle della Rebbia's excitement, and was quite ready and willing to justify himself. He proved that he had remained in the village all the evening; that his son Vincentello was with him at his house at the moment when the crime was committed; and lastly, that his son Orlanduccio had had an attack of fever on that very day, and had not left his bed. He produced all the guns belonging to his family, none of which had been fired off recently. With reference to the pocket-book, he added, he had at once perceived its importance; he had sealed it up, and placed it in the hands of his deputy, foreseeing that on account of his hostility to the Colonel, he might be suspected of the crime. In conclusion, he reminded the court

that Agostini had threatened to put to death the person who had written a letter in his name; and he insinuated that the bandit, probably suspecting the Colonel of the forgery, had assassinated him. Such acts of vengeance, for analogous motives, were by no means unprecedented.

Five days after the death of Colonel della Rebbia, Agostini was surprised by a detachment of soldiers, and fell, fighting desperately. On his person was found a letter from Colomba, adjuring him to declare whether or not he was guilty of the murder imputed to him. As the bandit had sent no answer to this appeal, it was very generally concluded that he had not had courage to tell a young girl that he had killed her father. Those persons, however, who pretended they were acquainted with Agostini's character, whispered that if he had killed the Colonel, he would have boasted of the deed. Another bandit, known by the name of Brandolaccio, sent to Colomba a declaration, in which he asseverated, upon his honour, that his comrade was innocent; but the only proof that he alleged in support of his statement, was that Agostini had never told him that he suspected the Colonel.

The conclusion of the whole matter was this:—the Barricini were left undisturbed; the Judge loaded the Mayor with praises; and the Mayor brought his noble conduct to a climax by abandoning all his pretensions to the brook with reference to which he had been at law with Colonel della Rebbia.

According to the custom of the country, Colomba improvised a *ballata* over the corpse of her father, in presence of her assembled friends. In this, she gave utterance to all her hatred of the Barricini, and formally accused them of the assassination, threatening them also with the vengeance of her brother. It was this *ballata*, which had become very popular, that the sailor had sung to Miss Lydia. On being informed of his father's death, Orso, who was then in the north of France, requested leave of absence, but could not obtain it. At first, in reliance upon his sister's letter, he had believed the Barricini guilty, but he soon received a copy of the evidence brought forward, and a private letter from the Judge, which almost thoroughly convinced him that the bandit Agostini was the only guilty person. Once every three months Colomba wrote to him to repeat her suspicions, or, as she called

them, her proofs. In spite of himself, these accusations made his Corsican blood boil, and sometimes he was not far from sharing in his sister's prejudices. Whenever he wrote to her, however, he reiterated that her allegations were based upon no solid foundation, and deserved no belief. He even forbade her, but always ineffectually, to say anything more on the subject to him. Two years passed in this manner, at the end of which he was placed on half-pay, and then he resolved to return to his native land, not for the purpose of revenging himself upon persons whom he believed innocent, but to provide for his sister's marriage, and to sell his small property, in order that he might live in future on the Continent.



## CHAPTER VII.

WHETHER it was that his sister's arrival had reminded Orso more forcibly of his father's house, or whether he was afraid that Colomba's costume and rustic manners might excite the mirth of his civilized friends, he announced his intention, on the following day, to leave Ajaccio and return to Pietranera. He readily obtained a promise from the Colonel that he would pay him a visit at his humble dwelling, when he went to Bastia, and in return, he undertook to supply abundance of sport,—deer, wild boars, pheasants, and the like.

On the evening before his departure, instead of going out shooting, Orso proposed a walk on the shore of the gulf. Giving his arm to Miss Lydia, he was able to chat freely with her, for Colomba had remained in the town to make some small purchases, and the Colonel was off

every moment to shoot at gulls and gannets, to the great surprize of the passers by, who could not understand why a man should waste his powder upon such game.

They rambled along the road which leads to the *Chapelle des Grecs*, whence the finest view of the bay may be obtained ; but they paid no attention to anything they saw.

"Miss Lydia," said Orso, after a silence which had lasted long enough to become embarrassing, "candidly, what do you think of my sister?"

"I like her very much," replied Miss Nevil. "Much more than I like you," she added with a smile, "for she is a true Corsican, whereas you are too civilized for a savage."

"Too civilized ! Alas ! in spite of myself, since I have set foot in this island, I feel as though I were becoming a savage again. A thousand horrid thoughts agitate and torment me, and it will do me good to chat with you a little before I bury myself in the desert to which I am going."

"You must take courage, sir. See how resigned your sister is ; she sets you a fine example."

"Ah! you are mistaken. Do not believe in her resignation. She has not said a word to me yet, but in all her looks I read what she expects of me."

"And what does she expect of you?"

"Oh! nothing, only that I should try whether your father's gun will kill a man as surely as a partridge."

"What an idea! And can you suppose such a thing, when you have just confessed that she has not said a word to you on the subject? It is really dreadful of you."

"If she did not entertain thoughts of vengeance, she would at once have spoken to me about our father; but she has done nothing of the kind. She would have uttered the name of those whom she considers—wrongly as I know—his murderers: but not a word has she spoken. We Corsicans are a cunning race. She is aware that she does not yet hold me completely in her power, and she does not wish to frighten me while I can still escape. When once she has led me to the edge of the precipice, when my head becomes dizzy, she will push me into the abyss."

Orso then gave Miss Nevil some details

regarding his father's death, and enumerated the principal proofs which led him to look upon Agostini as the murderer. "No evidence," he added, "can avail to convince Colomba. I know this from her last letter. She has sworn the death of the Barricini; and Miss Nevil,—see what confidence I place in you!—perhaps they would no longer be in this world, unless by one of those prejudices which are excused by her wild education, she felt persuaded that the execution of vengeance devolves upon me as head of the family, and that my honour is pledged to inflict it."

"Really, M. della Rebbia," said Miss Nevil, "you are calumniating your sister."

"No; you have said it yourself—she is a Corsican—she thinks as they all think. Do you know why I was so sad yesterday?"

"No; but for some time you have been subject to these attacks of bad temper. You were much more amiable when we first made your acquaintance."

"Yesterday, on the contrary, I was gayer and happier than usual. I was delighted with your kindness and indulgence towards my sister. The Colonel and I were returning home in a boat, and one of the boatmen said to me

in his infernal patois: 'You have killed much game, Ors' Anton,' but you will find Orlanduccio Barricini a better marksman than yourself.' "

"Well! what was there so very terrible in those words? Are you so very proud of your prowess as a sportsman?"

"But do you not perceive that the wretch meant that I should not have courage to kill Orlanduccio?"

"Do you know, M. della Rebbia, that you frighten me. It appears that the climate of your island not only excites fever, but produces madness. Fortunately we are soon going to leave it."

"Not before you have been to Pietranera. You have promised my sister that you would come."

"And if we failed to perform our promise, we ought doubtless to expect the infliction of summary vengeance."

"Do you remember the story your father told us the other day about those Indians, who threatened to starve themselves if the governor of the company would not accede to their requests?"

"So you mean to say you would die of hun-

ger? I doubt it. You would go one day without eating anything, and then Mademoiselle Colomba would make you such a delicious *bruccio*,\* that you would give up your project."

"You are cruel in your raillery, Miss Nevil; you ought to be gentle with me. As you see, I am alone here. I had only you to prevent me from going mad, as you say. You were my guardian angel, and now——"

"Now," said Miss Lydia in a serious tone, "to save yourself from so unpleasant a catastrophe, you have your honour as a man and a soldier; and," she continued, turning aside to pluck a flower, "if that will be of any service, the recollection of your guardian angel."

"Ah! Miss Nevil, if I might think that you really took a little interest——"

"Listen, M. della Rebbia," said Miss Nevil, with some emotion, "as you are a child, I will treat you as a child. When I was a little girl, my mother gave me a beautiful necklace which I was very anxious to possess; but she said: 'Every time that you put on this neck,

\* A species of cream-cheese, baked. It is a national dish in Corsica.

lace, remember that you do not know French yet.' The necklace lost somewhat of its merit in my eyes. It had become an object of remorse to me; but I wore it, and learned French at last. Do you see this ring? It is an Egyptian beetle, found, if you please, in a pyramid. The curious figure which you, perhaps, suppose to be a bottle, represents *human life*. There are persons in my native land who would think the hieroglyph very appropriate. The second figure is a buckler, with an arm holding a lance. It signifies *conflict, battle*. The union of these two characters forms this device, which I think is rather pretty: *Life is a conflict*. Do not suppose that I translate the hieroglyphics fluently; a very learned man explained their meaning to me. But there, I give you my beetle. Whenever any bad Corsican thought comes over you, look at my talisman, and say to yourself that you must be conqueror in the battle you have to fight with evil passions. Well! really I don't preach badly."

"I will think of you, Miss Nevil, and will say to myself——"

"Say to yourself that you have a friend who would be very sorry to hear that you were

hanged. Besides, such a fate would greatly grieve your ancestors, the corporals."

With these words she left Orso, and ran to her father, saying: "Do leave those poor birds alone, papa, and come with us to make some poetry in Napoleon's grotto."



## CHAPTER VIII.

THERE is always something solemn in a departure, even when friends separate only for a short time. Orso and his sister were to start early in the morning; and on the previous evening he had bidden farewell to Miss Lydia, for he did not expect that she would make an exception in his favour, and rise in time to see them start. Their leave-taking was cold and grave. Ever since their conversation on the sea-shore Miss Lydia had been afraid of having manifested too lively an interest in Orso's fate; and the young Corsican, on his part, had taken her raillery, and particularly her tone of levity, greatly to heart. At one moment, he had fancied he discerned indications of nascent affection in the behaviour of the young Englishwoman: but now, disconcerted by her pleasantry, he abandoned himself to the mournful

reflection that he was nothing in her eyes but a simple acquaintance, who would soon be forgotten. Great, therefore, was his surprise when, on the next morning, as he sat taking coffee with the Colonel, he saw Miss Lydia enter the room, followed by his sister. She had risen at five o'clock, and, for an English lady, above all for Miss Nevil, this was so great an effort that he could not but feel highly flattered.

"I am very sorry that you should have been disturbed so early," said Orso. "I am afraid my sister woke you, notwithstanding my orders; and I dare say you are very angry with us both. Perhaps you wish I were hanged already."

"No," said Miss Lydia, in a low tone, and in Italian, evidently that her father might not understand her. "But you were cross with me, yesterday, because of my innocent pleasant-ries, and I did not wish you to go away with a bad opinion of me. What terrible folks you are—you Corsicans! Now, good-bye; to meet again soon, I hope." And she gave him her hand.

Orso's only answer was a sigh. Colomba drew near him, led him into the embrasure of a window, and, showing him something which

she had under her mezzaro, spoke to him for a moment in a low tone.

"My sister," said Orso to Miss Nevil, "wishes to give you a singular present, Miss Lydia; but we Corsicans have never much to give, except our affection,—which time cannot efface. My sister tells me that you looked with curiosity at this stiletto. It is an heirloom in our family. Probably it once hung at the girdle of one of those corporals to whom I owe the honour of your acquaintance. Colomba thinks it is so precious, that she has requested my permission to give it you, and I hardly know whether to grant it or not, for I am afraid you will laugh at us."

"It is a charming stiletto," said Miss Lydia, "but it is a family heirloom, and I cannot think of taking it."

"It was not my father's dagger," exclaimed Colomba. "It was given to one of my mother's ancestors by King Theodore. If you would accept it, you would do us a great pleasure."

"Come, Miss Nevill," said Orso, "do not disdain the stiletto of a king."

To an amateur, relics of King Theodore are infinitely more precious than those of the most powerful monarch. The temptation was strong,

and Miss Lydia already perceived the effect that would be produced by the weapon, when placed on the writing-table in her boudoir at St. James's Place.

"But dear Miss Colomba," she said, taking up the stiletto with the hesitation of a person desirous to accept it, and looking at Colomba with one of her sweetest smiles, "I cannot—I dare not let you go away thus unarmed."

"My brother is with me," said Colomba, proudly, "and we have the beautiful gun which your father gave us. Orso, have you loaded it with ball?"

Miss Nevil kept the stiletto, and Colomba, in order to avoid the danger incurred by *giving* cutting or wounding instruments to a friend, exacted a halfpenny in payment.

At length they were obliged to leave. Orso shook Miss Nevil by the hand once more: Colomba embraced her, and then offered her rosy lips to be saluted by the Colonel, who was as much surprised as pleased at her Corsican politeness. From the window Miss Lydia saw the brother and sister mount their horses. Colomba's eyes sparkled with a malignant joy which she had not before observed. The sight of this courageous and strong-minded woman,

so fanatical in her ideas of barbarian honour, with pride on her forehead, and her lips curved with a sardonic smile, leading off the young man armed, as it were, for a hostile expedition, reminded her of Orso's fears, and made Colomba seem his evil genius dragging him onwards to destruction. Orso, who had by this time mounted, raised his head and perceived her. Either because he had guessed her thoughts, or wished to bid her a last adieu, he raised his Egyptian ring to his lips. Miss Lydia blushed and left the window; but, soon returning, she saw the two Corsicans ride off on their little poneys, at full gallop towards the mountains. Half an hour afterwards the Colonel, by the aid of his telescope, pointed them out to her as they skirted the shore of the gulf, and she saw that Orso frequently looked back to the town. At last he disappeared. Miss Lydia looked in the glass and found she was pale.

"What must the young man think of me?" she said; "and what do I think of him? and why I do think of him at all?—A mere travelling acquaintance!—Why did I come to Corsica?—Oh! I do not love him!—No, no, that is utterly impossible.—And Colomba.—Me the

sister-in-law of a *voceratrice*! who wears a great stiletto!" And she perceived that she held King Theodore's dagger in her hand. She laid it on her dressing-table. "Colomba in London, dancing at Almack's! — What a lion she would be. — Perhaps she would create a great sensation. — He loves me, I am sure. — He is a hero of romance, whose adventurous career I have interrupted. — But did he really intend to avenge his father in the Corsican manner? — He was something between a Conrad and a dandy. — I have made him a pure dandy, and a dandy with a Corsican tailor!"

She laid herself on her bed and tried to sleep, but that was impossible; and I shall not undertake to continue her long monologue, during which she repeated, more than a hundred times, that M. della Rebbia never had been, was not, and never would be, anything to her.

## CHAPTER IX.

MEANWHILE Orso rode along with his sister. The rapid movement of their horses put a stop to all conversation for some time; but when the steepness of the hills over which they passed obliged them to proceed slowly, they exchanged a few words about the friends whom they had just left. Colomba was enthusiastic in her praise of Miss Nevil's beauty, of her waving hair, and of her graceful manners. Then she inquired whether the Colonel were as rich as he appeared to be, and whether Miss Lydia were his only daughter. "She will be a good match," she said. "Her father appears to be very friendly towards you." And as Orso made no answer, she continued: "Our family was wealthy in former times, and is still one of the most respectable in the island. All

the *signori* \* are bastards. There are no true nobles but those who belong to the corporal families, and you know, Orso, that you are descended from the first corporals of the island. You know that our family resided originally on the other side of the mountains; † and that we were compelled by the civil wars to come to this side. If I were in your place, Orso, I should not hesitate,—I should ask Miss Nevil in marriage of her father—(Orso shrugged his shoulders). With her dowry I would purchase the woods of La Falsetta, and the vineyards just below our house; I would build a beautiful stone house to live in, and I would add another story to the old tower at which Sambucuccio killed so many Moors in the time of Count Arrigo bel Missere.” ‡

\* The descendants of the feudal lords of Corsica are called *signori*. Between the families of the *signori* and those of the *caporali* there is a contest as to nobility.

† That is, from the eastern side of the island. The very common expression *di là dei monti* varies in meaning, according to the position of the person who employs it. Corsica is intersected by a chain of mountains running from north to south.

‡ See Filippini, lib. ii. Count Arrigo bel Missere died about the year 1000; it is said that at his death a voice was heard in the air, singing these prophetic words:

E morto il Conte Arrigo bel Missere:

E Corsica sarà di male in peggio.



“Colomba, you are quite silly,” replied Orso, putting his horse to a gallop.

“You are a man, Ors’ Anton’, and doubtless you know better than a woman what you ought to do. But I should like to know what objection this Englishman could have to our alliance. Are there any corporals in England?”——

After a rather long conversation of this nature, the brother and sister arrived at a little village, not far from Bocagnano, where they stopped to dine and spend the night with a friend of their family. They were received with that genuine Corsican hospitality which must be experienced to be properly appreciated. On the next day their host, who had been a great crony of Madame della Rebbia, accompanied them for some distance on their journey.

“Do you see those woods and copses?” said he to Orso, as he left them; “a man who had *had an accident* might live there for ten years in peace, without any gendarmes or soldiers coming to look for him. These woods adjoin the forest of Vizzavona; and, if he had friends at Bocagnano or its neighbourhood, he would want for nothing. You have a beautiful gun there; it carries a long distance, I should think,

*Sangue de la Madona!* what calibre! With such a weapon you could kill better game than wild boars."

Orso coldly replied that it was an English gun, and would carry a bullet a long way. The friends then embraced, and each continued his journey.

When our travellers had arrived at a short distance from Pietranera, they perceived, at the entrance of a defile which they would have to traverse, seven or eight men armed with guns, some sitting upon large stones, some lying on the grass, while others were standing up, and apparently on the watch. Their horses were feeding at a little distance. Colomba looked at them for an instant through a spy-glass, which she took out of one of those large leathern pockets which all Corsicans carry with them when travelling.

"Those are our people!" she cried, joyously. "Pieruccio did his bidding well."

"What people?" inquired Orso.

"Our shepherds," she replied. "The day before yesterday I sent Pieruccio back to collect these brave fellows together, that they might accompany you to your house. It would not be proper for you to enter Pietranera

without an escort, for you must be aware that the Barricini are capable of anything."

"Colomba," said Orso, in a severe tone, "I have begged you many times never again to speak to me of the Barricini, and of your unfounded suspicions. I shall certainly not be so ridiculous as to return home with this troop, and I am very displeased at your having brought them here without telling me."

"My brother, you have forgotten the customs of your country. It is my duty to watch over you when your imprudence would expose you to danger. I have only done my duty."

At this moment the shepherds perceiving them, ran to their horses and galloped to meet them.

"*Evviva Ors' Anton'!*" cried a robust old man with a white beard, dressed, notwithstanding the heat, in a hooded cloak of Corsican cloth, thicker than the fleece of his goats. "He's the very picture of his father, only taller and stronger. What a beautiful gun! This gun will soon have a reputation, Ors' Anton'."

"*Evviva Ors' Anton'!*" repeated all the shepherds, in chorus. "We knew well that he would return at last!"

"Ah ! Ors' Anton'," said a tall fellow, with a brick-coloured complexion," how joyful your father would be if he were here to receive you ! The dear man ! he would have been alive yet if he had only believed me, and allowed me to settle Giudice's business. Poor fellow ! he would not listen to me ; but now he knows that I was right."

"Never mind !" said the old man," Giudice won't lose by waiting."

"*Evviva Ors' Anton' !*" And a dozen guns were fired off in admiration of this sentiment.

Orso was not best pleased to find himself in the midst of this group of men on horseback, all of whom were talking at once, and pressing forward to shake him by the hand. Some time elapsed before he could make himself heard ; but at length, assuming the air which he wore when reprimanding or punishing the soldiers of his platoon, he said :

"I thank you, my friends, for the affection which you manifest towards me, and which you felt for my father ; but it is my intention, and my wish, to receive advice from nobody. I know perfectly well what I ought to do."

"He is right ! he is right !" cried the shep-

herds. "You well know that you can reckon upon us."

"Yes, I do reckon upon you; but I have no need of your services at present, and no danger threatens my house. So right about face, and return to your flocks. I know the way to Pietranera, and do not want any guides."

"Fear nothing, Ors' Anton'," said the old man; "*they* would not dare to show themselves to-day. The mouse runs into its hole when the cat comes back."

"Cat yourself, old white-beard!" said Orso. "What is your name?"

"What! don't you know me, Ors' Anton',—me who have so often carried you behind my old mule? Don't you know Polo Griffo? A brave fellow, as you see, devoted body and soul to the Della Rebbias. Say the word, and when your great gun speaks, this old musket, as old as its master, will not be silent, you may be sure."

"Thank you, thank you! but, for heaven's sake, go to your business and let us continue our journey."

The shepherds at length rode off, at full trot, towards the village; but from time to time they halted at every elevated point in

the road, as if to examine whether there were not some hidden ambuscade, and they always kept near enough to Orso and his sister to be able to render them assistance in case of need. And old Polo Griffo said to his companions :

“ I understand him, I understand him ! He does not say what he means to do, but he will do it. He's the very picture of his father. It's all very fine for him to say that he bears malice to no one—he has made a vow to Saint Nega.\* For my part, I would not give a fig for the mayor's skin. Before a month's ever, there won't be enough of it left to make a bottle with.”

Thus preceded by this troop of scouts, the descendant of the Della Rebbias entered his village, and reached the old manor-house of the corporals, his ancestors. The Rebbianists, who had long been without a leader, came out in a body to meet him, and those inhabitants of the village, who observed a strict neutrality, were all standing at their doors to see him pass. The Barricinists remained in their houses, and looked at him through the crevices in their shutters.

\* This saint is not to be found in the calendar. To make a vow to Saint Nega, is to deny everything intentionally.

The town of Pietranera is very irregularly built, like all the villages in Corsica; for, to see a street, you must go to Cargese, which was built by M. de Marbœuf. The houses; which are arranged with the utmost irregularity and without the slightest pretension to orderly grouping, occupy the summit of a small plateau, or, to speak more correctly, a landing-place of the mountain. Nearly in the midst of the town stands a fine old oak-tree, and close by, is a granite trough into which water is brought from a neighbouring spring by means of a wooden pipe. This monument of public utility was constructed at the expense of the two families of Della Rebbia and Barricini; but it would be a great mistake to imagine that this was a proof of their friendliness in bygone days. On the contrary, it was the work of their jealousy. Once upon a time, Colonel Della Rebbia sent to the municipal council of his commune a small sum as his contribution towards the erection of a fountain. Advocate Barricini immediately forwarded a donation of equal amount; and to this conflict of generosity Pietranera is indebted for its water. Around the oak-tree and the fountain, there is an open space called

the Square, where all the loungers of the place assemble in the evening, sometimes to play at cards, and once a year, in Carnival time, to dance. At the two extremities of the Square stand two lofty, but narrow edifices, built of granite and schist. These are the hostile *towers* of the Della Rebbias and the Barricini. Their architecture is uniform, their height is the same, and they indicate that the rivalry between the two families had always been maintained, although fortune had not decided in favour of either.

It is perhaps necessary to explain the true meaning of the word *tower*, in Corsica. It is a square building about forty feet in height, which in any other country would just simply be called a pigeon-house. The narrow doorway is raised about eight feet above the ground, and is reached by a steep staircase. Above the door is a window with a kind of machicolated balcony, from which you could, without danger to yourself, knock an indiscreet visitor on the head. Between the window and the door are two escutcheons, rudely sculptured. One of them formerly bore the Genoese cross, but this has been so carefully chipped off, that traces of it are discernible only by



the eye of an antiquary. On the other escutcheon are sculptured the arms of the family to whom the tower belongs. To complete the decorations, add some marks of musket-balls on the escutcheons and framework of the window, and you will have a tolerably correct idea of a Corsican manor-house in the Middle Ages. I must not forget to mention that the dwelling-house adjoins the tower, with which it is frequently connected by some internal communication.

The tower and residence of the Della Rebbias occupied the north side of the Square of Pietranera; while the tower and residence of the Barricini family stood on the southern side. From the northern tower to the fountain was the promenade of the Della Rebbias, while that of the Barricini lay on the opposite side. Since the burial of the Colonel's wife, no member of either of the two families had ever been seen in any other part of the Square but that which was assigned to him by a sort of tacit agreement. In order to shorten his journey, Orso was going to pass in front of the mayor's house, when his sister reminded him of his mistake, and suggested that he should ride up a by-path which would lead

them to their house without crossing the Square.

"Nonsense!" said Orso. "Why should we give ourselves so much trouble. Is not the Square common property?" And he spurred his horse onward.

"Brave heart!" said Colomba, in a low tone. "My father, thou shalt be avenged!"

On reaching the Square, Colomba placed herself between the house of the Barricini and her brother, and kept her eyes constantly fixed upon the windows of her enemies. She remarked that they had been barricaded quite recently, and that *archere* had been bored in the planks. These *archere* are narrow openings in the form of loop-holes, pierced between the thick planks with which the lower part of a window is closed. When any attack is feared, a barricade of this kind is erected, so that the inmates of the house may fire upon their assailants, under cover of the planks.

"The cowards!" exclaimed Colomba. "See, brother, they have already begun to fortify their house! they have erected barricades already! but they will be forced to come out some day!"

The presence of Orso on the southern side

of the Square produced an immense sensation in Pietranera, and was considered as a proof of audacity bordering upon temerity. Among the neutral party who assembled in the evening around the oak-tree, it was the text of interminable commentaries.

“It’s fortunate,” it was said, “that Barri-cini’s sons have not yet returned, for they are less enduring than their father, and perhaps they would not have allowed their enemy to pass over their ground without making him pay dearly for his bravado.”

“Remember what I am now going to tell you, neighbour,” added an old man who was the oracle of the town. “I have observed Colomba’s face to-day; she has something in her head. I can smell powder in the air. Before many days are over, butcher’s meat will be cheap in Pietranera.”

## CHAPTER X.

SEPARATED from his father in his earliest youth, Orso had never had much opportunity of becoming acquainted with his character. He had left Pietranera at fifteen years of age to pursue his studies at Pisa, and had entered at the military school whilst Ghilfuccio was following the imperial eagles throughout Europe. On the Continent Orso had seen him only at rare intervals, and it was not until 1815 that he had been able to exchange into the regiment commanded by his father. But the Colonel, who was a rigid disciplinarian, treated his son in the same manner as he treated the other young lieutenants, that is to say, with considerable severity. Orso's recollections of his father were, therefore, of two kinds. He remembered him at Pietranera, lending him his sabre, allowing him to fire off his gun when

he returned from the chase, and permitting him to sit for the first time at the family table. And then his thoughts would revert to Colonel della Rebbia placing him under arrest for some madcap prank, and never calling him by any other name than Lieutenant della Rebbia:—"Lieutenant della Rebbia, you are not in your rank, three days arrest."—"Your skirmishers are five yards too far from the reserve corps, five days arrest."—"You are in your foraging-cap at five minutes past twelve, eight days arrest." Once only, at Quatre Bras, he had said to him: "Well done, Orso; but be prudent." But these last recollections were not suggested to his mind by his return to Pietranera. The sight of the familiar haunts of his childhood, and of the various associations connected with his mother, whom he had tenderly loved, awakened within his soul a crowd of sweet though painful emotions: but on the other hand, the dark future which lay before him, the vague disquietude with which his sister had inspired him, and more than all, the idea that Miss Nevil was about to visit his house, which now seemed to him so small, so poor, and so unsuited to receive a person accustomed to luxury, the contempt with which she might

perhaps regard it—all these thoughts passed chaotically through his head, and threw him into a state of profound discouragement.

He sat down to supper in a large arm-chair of black oak, in which his father used to preside over the family meals, and smiled at seeing Colomba hesitate to sit down to table with him. He was, however, much obliged to her for keeping silence during the repast, and retiring as soon as it was ended, for he felt himself too agitated to resist the attacks which she doubtless intended to make upon him ; but Colomba knew her brother too well to endanger the success of her design by breaking it too suddenly to him. With his head resting upon his hand, he remained for some time absorbed in thought, passing over his mind the scenes of the last fortnight. He was alarmed at the anxiety with which he knew his fellow-townsmen would watch his conduct towards the Barricini ; and he was compelled reluctantly to admit that he was beginning to regard the opinion of Pietranera as the opinion of society at large. He must take revenge, or pass for a coward. But on whom must he take vengeance ? He could not believe the Barricini to be guilty of murder. It is true they were the enemies of

his family, but it required all the coarse prejudices of his countrymen to ascribe to them so heinous a crime as an assassination. Sometimes he contemplated Miss Nevil's talisman, and repeated its meaning in a low tone: "Life is a conflict." At length he said aloud: "*I will be conqueror!*" With this good thought he arose, and taking his lamp, was about to ascend to his bedroom, when he heard a knock at the door of the house. It was an unseasonable hour to receive a visit; but Colomba appeared immediately, followed by the serving-woman.

"It is nothing of any consequence," she said to her brother, as she ran to the door. Before she opened it, however, she enquired who was there.

"Me," replied a gentle voice.

The wooden bar placed across the door was immediately removed, and Colomba returned to the dining-room followed by a little girl of about ten years of age, ragged and barefoot, with her head covered with a common handkerchief, beneath the folds of which long tresses of hair as black as a raven's wing were partially concealed. The child was pale and thin, and her skin was tanned by the sun, but the fire of

intelligence sparkled in her eyes. When she saw Orso, she stopped timidly, and made him a respectful curtsy; and then she spoke to Colomba in a low voice, and placed in her hands a pheasant which, apparently, had just been killed.

"Thank you, Chili," said Colomba. "Thank your uncle for me. Is he very well?"

"Quite well, Miss, at your service. I could not come sooner because he was late. I waited three hours for him in the *mdquis*."

"Then I suppose you have had no supper."

"Not yet, Miss. I have had no time to get any."

"You shall sup here before you go. Has your uncle any bread left?"

"A little, Miss; but he is chiefly in want of gunpowder. Now that the chestnuts are ripe, he does not want anything but gunpowder."

"I will give you a loaf and some powder for him. But tell him not to waste it, as it is very dear."

"Colomba," said Orso in French, "upon whom are you bestowing your charity?"

"On a poor bandit of this village," replied Colomba in the same language. "This little girl is his niece."



"It appears to me that you might bestow your bounty on a more worthy object. Why should you send powder to a rascal who will probably use it to commit fresh crimes? If it had not been for that deplorable affection which everybody here seems to entertain for bandits, they would have disappeared long ago from Corsica."

"The worst people in our island are not those who are *in the country*."\*

"Give them bread if you please, for we should refuse bread to no one; but I do not approve of their being supplied with ammunition."

"My brother," said Colomba in a serious tone, "you are the master here, and everything in this house belongs to you; but I tell you before hand, I will give my *mezzaro* to this little girl that she may sell it, rather than refuse powder to a bandit. Refuse him powder! I might as well betray him to the gendarmes. What protection has he against them, except his cartridges?"

Meanwhile the little girl was greedily devouring a piece of bread, and attentively observing

\* To be *alla campagna* means to be a bandit. Bandit is not a term of reproach, but signifies merely a banished person, corresponding to the *outlaw* of English ballads.

alternately Colomba and her brother, seeking to learn from their eyes the meaning of what they were saying.

“And what has your bandit been doing?” said Orso. “What crime drove him to seek shelter in the *máquis*?”

“Brandolaccio has committed no crime,” exclaimed Colomba. “He slew Giovan’ Opizzo, who had assassinated his father whilst he was in the army.”

Orso turned aside his head, took his lamp, and went up to his room, without venturing to reply. Then Colomba gave powder and provisions to the child, and, as she led her to the door, repeated over and over again; “Especially tell your uncle to keep good watch over Orso!”

## CHAPTER XI.

It was a long time before Orso could get to sleep, and, consequently, he awoke very late, at least, for a Corsican. As soon as he got up, the first object that met his eyes was the house of his enemies, and the *archere* which had been pierced for its defence. He went down stairs and asked for his sister.

"She is in the kitchen, casting bullets," replied the servant Saveria.

Thus he could not take a single step without being pursued by the image of war.

He found Colomba sitting on a stool, with her lap full of freshly-cast bullets, cutting off the excrescences of lead.

"What the deuce are you doing?" inquired her brother.

"You had no bullets to fit the Colonel's gun," replied Colomba, in her gentlest tones.

"I have found a mould of the right calibre, and you shall have four-and-twenty cartridges to-day, my brother."

"I don't want them, thank Heaven!"

"You must not be caught unprovided, Ors' Anton'? You have forgotten your country, and the people who surround you."

"I should have forgotten them, if you had not taken care to remind me of them so continually. But, tell me, did not a large portmanteau come here for me a few days ago?"

"Yes, brother. Shall I carry it up to your room?"

"You carry it up! you will never be strong enough to lift it. Is not there some man about the house to do it?"

"I am not so weak as you think," said Colomba, turning up her sleeves and disclosing a white and rounded arm, perfectly well-shaped, but indicative of unusual strength. "Come, Saveria," she said to the servant, "help me." She had already lifted the heavy trunk when Orso hastened to assist her.

"There is something for you in that trunk, my dear Colomba," said he. "You will excuse me for giving you such poor presents, but the

purse of a half-pay lieutenant is not very well furnished." So saying, he opened the trunk, and took out several dresses, a shawl, and other articles suitable for a young lady.

"What pretty things," exclaimed Colomba. "I will make haste and lock them up, lest they should be spoiled. I shall keep them for my wedding," she added, with a melancholy smile, "for now I am in mourning." And she kissed her brother's hand.

"Is there no affectation, my sister, in remaining so long in mourning?"

"I have sworn it," said Colomba, firmly. "I shall not put off my mourning——" And she looked through the window at the house of the Barricini.

"Until your wedding-day," said Orso, endeavouring to anticipate the conclusion of her sentence.

"I will never marry any one," said Colomba, "but a man who has done three things." And she continued to contemplate the hostile dwelling with sinister looks.

"You are so pretty, Colomba, that I wonder you are not married already. Come, you shall tell me all about your suitors. I suppose I shall hear plenty of serenades. They must be

well executed to please such a consummate *voceratrice* as yourself."

"Who would care to marry a poor orphan? And, besides, the man who will make me go out of mourning must make other women put on mourning."

"This is madness," said Orso to himself; but he made no answer, as he wished to avoid all discussion.

"My brother," said Colomba, in a coaxing tone, "I also have something to offer you. The clothes which you have on are too good for this part of the world. Your beautiful coat would be torn to pieces in two days if you were to wear it in the *maquis*. You must keep it until Miss Nevil comes." Then, opening a chest, she produced a complete hunting-suit. "I have made you a velvet waistcoat, and here is a cap like those which our dandies wear; I embroidered it for you a very long time ago. Will you try them on?"

And she made him put on a large vest of green velvet, with enormous pockets. She placed on his head a peaked cap of black velvet, embroidered in jet and silk of the same colour, and ending in a kind of top-knot.

"Here is our father's cartridge-belt,"\* she said; "his stiletto is in your waistcoat-pocket. I will run and fetch the pistol."

"I look like a regular brigand of the Comic Opera," said Orso, surveying himself in a little mirror which Saveria held before him.

"That is, your new dress becomes you admirably well, Ors' Anton'," said the old servant, "and the most dashing *pinsuto*† of Bocognano or Bastelica could not look finer."

Orso breakfasted in his new costume, and during the repast he told his sister that his trunk contained several books, and that he intended to have more sent from France and Italy, and to make her study a great deal. "For it is a disgrace, Colomba," he added, "that a young woman like yourself should still be ignorant of many things which, on the Continent, children learn as soon as they leave the nursery."

"You are right, my brother," said Colomba. "I am well aware of my deficiencies, and I

\* *Carchera*, a belt to contain ammunition, with space to hold a pistol on the left side.

† *Pinsuto*, the name given to those who wear the peaked cap, *barreta pinsuta*.

shall like nothing better than to study, especially if you will teach me."

"Several days passed, without Colomba's mentioning the name of the Barricini. She was always bestowing little attentions on her brother, and frequently spoke to him of Miss Nevil. Orso made her read French and Italian works, and was frequently as much surprised at the justness and good sense of her observations, as at the profound ignorance which she displayed of the commonest subjects.

One morning, after breakfast, Colomba left the room for a moment, and, instead of returning with a book and paper, appeared with her *mezzaro* on her head. Her face wore an aspect of more than ordinary seriousness.

"My brother," she said, "will you take a walk with me?"

"Whither do you wish me to go?" said Orso, offering her his arm.

"I do not require your arm, my brother; but bring your gun and cartridge-box. A man should never go out unarmed."

"As you please! I must conform to the fashion. But whither are we going?"

Colomba, without replying, tied her *mezzaro* round her head, called the watch-dog, and left



the house, followed by her brother. Walking quickly out of the village, she took a hollow road which wound through the vineyards, sending the dog on before her, after having made him a sign which he seemed perfectly to understand: for he began immediately to run zigzag, dodging through the vines, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, keeping about fifty paces in advance of his mistress, and stopping occasionally in the middle of the road to look at her and wag his tail. He seemed to discharge his duty as a scout with admirable intelligence.

“If Muschetto barks,” said Colomba, “cock your gun, my brother, and stand perfectly still.”

At the distance of half a mile from the village, after many windings, Colomba stopped suddenly at a place where the road made an angle. There arose a little pyramid of boughs, some green, others withered, heaped up to the height of about three feet. Through the summit peered the extremity of a wooden cross, painted black. In several cantons of Corsica, and especially in the mountainous districts, an extremely ancient custom, which is probably connected with the superstitions of Paganism,

requires all passers-by to throw a stone or the branch of a tree on the spot where a man has perished by a violent death. During long years, as long as the recollection of his tragic fate remains in the memory of men, this singular offering thus accumulates from day to day. It is called the heap, the *mucchio*, of the deceased person.

Colomba paused before this mound of foliage, and, plucking a branch from an arbutus-tree, added it to the pyramid. "Orso," she said, "it was here our father died. Let us pray for his soul, my brother." And she fell on her knees. Orso immediately followed her example. Just then, the bell of the village church tolled slowly, for a man had died during the night. Orso burst into tears.

After kneeling a few minutes, Colomba rose, with dry eyes, but her whole countenance full of animation. She hastily made the peculiar sign of the cross with which her countrymen usually accompany their solemn oaths; and then, motioning her brother to follow her, she took the road leading back to the village. They re-entered their house in silence. Orso went at once to his room. An instant after, Colomba followed him thither, carrying a little

box which she laid on the table. Opening it, she took from it a shirt covered with large stains of blood. "This was your father's shirt, Orso!" And she threw it on his knees, "This was the lead which killed him!" And she placed two oxidated bullets on the shirt. "Orso, my brother!" she cried, rushing into his arms and clasping him convulsively, "Orso! thou wilt avenge him!" She embraced him with a kind of furious rapture, kissed the bullets and the shirt, and left the room, leaving her brother, as it were, riveted to his seat.

Orso remained motionless for some time, not daring to touch these horrible relics. At length, making an effort, he put them back into the box, ran to the other end of the room, and threw himself on his bed, with his head turned towards the wall and buried in his pillow, just as though he were striving to shut out from his eyes the aspect of a terrible phantom. The last words of his sister rang incessantly in his ears, and it seemed as though he heard the voice of a fatal and inevitable oracle, demanding blood, innocent blood, at his hands. I will not attempt to describe the sensations of the unhappy young man; they were as confused and chaotic as those which

distract the brain of a maniac. He remained for a long while in the same position, without daring to move his head. At length he rose, closed the box, and rushed precipitately from his house into the fields, walking straight forward without knowing whither he was going.

By degrees, the fresh air brought him relief; he became more calm, and examined with some composure his position and the means of escape from it. As I have already stated, he did not suspect the Barricini of the murder; but he did accuse them of having fabricated the letter from the bandit Agostini; and this letter, he believed, had caused the death of his father. To prosecute them for forgery was, he felt, impossible. If the prejudices or instincts of his country beset him for a moment, and suggested the facility of taking vengeance from the corner of a by-path, he dismissed them with horror as he thought of his regimental comrades, of his acquaintance in Paris, and especially of Miss Nevil. Then he reflected on his sister's reproaches, and all the Corsican element in his character justified those reproaches and rendered them more poignant. One only hope remained to him

in this struggle between his conscience and his prejudices, and that was, to pick a quarrel, on some pretext or another, with one of the sons of the advocate, and to fight a duel with him. To kill him by a pistol-shot or a sword-thrust reconciled both his French ideas and his Corsican notions. When he had hit upon this expedient and meditated the means for carrying it into execution, he felt himself already relieved from a great burden; whilst other and gentler thoughts contributed still more to calm his feverish agitation. Cicero, in despair at the death of his daughter Tullia, forgot his grief by revolving in his mind all the fine sentences that he might write upon the subject. Mr. Shandy consoled himself for the loss of his son, by discoursing in a similar strain upon life and death. Orso restored himself to equanimity by thinking that he would write to Miss Nevil a description of the state of his soul—which description he thought could not fail powerfully to interest that beautiful person.

He was drawing near to the village, from which he had unconsciously wandered to a considerable distance, when he heard the voice of a little girl who, doubtless thinking

herself quite alone, was singing in a pathway on the borders of the *mdquis*. It was that slow and monotonous air devoted to funereal lamentations, and the child sang: "To my son, my son, in a distant land—keep my cross and my blood-stained shirt——"

"What are you singing, little one?" said Orso in an angry tone, as he came suddenly up to the place where the girl was standing.

"I did not know it was you, Ors' Anton'!" said the child in alarm. "It is one of Miss Colomba's songs."

"I forbid you to sing it," said Orso, in a terrible voice.

The child, turning her head to right and left, seemed to be looking for some way of escape, and she would undoubtedly have run away if she had not been prevented by her anxiety not to lose a large parcel which lay on the ground at her feet.

Orso was ashamed of his violence.

"What have you got there, my child?" he asked, as gently as he could.

And as Chilina hesitated to reply, he lifted the cloth in which the parcel was wrapped, and saw that it contained a loaf and other provisions.

"To whom are you carrying this bread, my dear?" he inquired.

"You know very well, sir; to my uncle."

"And is not your uncle a bandit?"

"At your service, Ors' Anton'."

"If the gendarmes were to meet you, and asked whither you were going——"

"I should tell them," answered the child, unhesitatingly, "that I am carrying food to the Luccese who are cutting down the *mâquis*."

"And if you met some hungry huntsman who would like to dine at your expense, and take away your provisions?"

"No one would dare to do so. I should say that it was for my uncle."

"Ah! I suppose your uncle is not a man who would allow his dinner to be stolen with impunity. Is he very fond of you?"

"Oh, yes, Ors' Anton'. Ever since my father's death he has taken care of the family: of my mother, my little sister, and myself. Before mamma was ill, he used to recommend her to rich gentlefolks to give her work. The mayor gives me a new gown every year, and the curé has taught me to read my catechism, since my uncle spoke to them about me. But it is your sister who is most kind to us."

At this moment a dog appeared in the path. The little girl, putting two fingers in her mouth, uttered a shrill whistle. The dog immediately came to her and fawned upon her, and then plunged abruptly into the *máquis*. Soon after, two men badly clothed but well armed, appeared from behind a clump of bushes at a few paces from Orso. It seemed as though they must have crept forward like snakes through the thicket of cystus and myrtle which covered the ground.

“Welcome, Ors’ Anton’,” said the elder of the two men. “What! do you not remember me?”

“No,” said Orso, looking fixedly at him.

“’Tis strange how a beard and a peaked cap change the appearance of a man. Come, lieutenant, look well at me. Have you forgotten the old soldiers of Waterloo? Don’t you remember Brando Savelli, who bit more than one cartridge by your side on that day of ill-luck?”

“What! is it you?” said Orso. “You deserted in 1816!”

“As you say, lieutenant. Deuce take it, the service became a bore, and then I had an account to settle in this country. Ha! ha!



Chili, you are a good girl. Make haste and give us our dinner, for we are hungry. You have no idea, lieutenant, what an appetite one gets in the *mdquis*. Who sent us this present, Miss Colomba or the mayor?"

"Neither, uncle; it was the miller's wife who gave me this for you, and a bed quilt for mamma."

"What does she want of me?"

"She says that her Luccese, whom she hired to clear her land, now want thirty-five sous and the chestnuts, on account of the fever in the lower part of Pietranera."

"The lazy rascals!—I will see about it.—Come, lieutenant, will you take pot-luck with us? We have made many a worse meal together, in the time of our poor countryman whom they have put upon half-pay."

"No, thank you. They have put me upon half-pay, too."

"Yes, so I heard: but you were not very sorry for it, I'll warrant. You also have an account to settle. Come, parson," said the bandit to his comrade, "fall to. Monsieur Orso, allow me to introduce my reverend friend; that is to say, I'm not quite sure

whether he is a parson, but he has learning enough to be one."

"A poor student in theology, sir," said the second bandit, "who has been prevented from pursuing his vocation. Who knows? I might have been a Pope, Brandolaccio."

"What was the cause which deprived the Church of so brilliant an ornament?" inquired Orso.

"A mere nothing, an 'account to settle,' as my friend Brandolaccio says: one of my sisters who had committed follies while I was devouring books at the University of Pisa. I was obliged to return home to marry her. But the bridegroom, with foolish haste, died of fever three days before my arrival. I then addressed myself, as you would have done in my place, to the brother of the deceased. I was told that he was married already. What could I do?"

"Really, it was an embarrassing dilemma. What did you do?"

"Why, these are cases in which one must have recourse to the gunflint."

"You mean to say that——"

"I put a bullet into his head," coolly replied the bandit.

Orso shuddered. And yet curiosity, and perhaps a desire to delay the moment of his return home, made him remain where he was, and continue his conversation with these two men, each of whom had at least one assassination on his conscience.

Whilst his comrade was speaking, Brandolaccio placed before him a supply of bread and meat: then he helped himself, and gave a share to his dog, which he introduced to Orso by the name of Brusco, as gifted with a marvellous instinct which enabled him to recognize a gendarme under whatever disguise he might assume. Last of all, he cut a piece of bread, and a slice of raw ham, and gave them to his niece.

“The bandit lives a grand life!” exclaimed the student in theology, after having eaten a few mouthfuls. “Perhaps you will try it some day, M. della Rebbia, and then you will learn how delightful it is to know no other master than your caprice.” So far the bandit had spoken in Italian, but he continued in French: “Corsica is not a very amusing country for a young man to live in; but if you are a bandit, what a difference! The women are madly in love with us. Such as you see me, I have three

mistresses in three different cantons. I am at home wherever I go. And one of them is the wife of a gendarme."

"You are quite a linguist, sir," said Orso, gravely.

"I speak in French, because, you know, *maxima debetur pueris reverentia*. Brando-laccio and I intend that the little lass shall turn out well and keep in the right way."

"When she is fifteen years old," said Chilina's uncle, "I shall marry her well. I have a husband in view for her already."

"And do you mean to make the proposition to him?" said Orso.

"Of course I do. If I were to say to any rich man in the country: 'I Brando Savelli, should be glad to see your son marry Micheline Savelli,'—do you think he would expose himself to the risk of having his ears pulled?"

"I would not advise him to do so," said the other bandit. "My comrade's hand is rather heavy."

"If I were a scoundrel," continued Brando-laccio, "a blackguard, or a cheat, I should only need to open my wallet, and money would rain into it."

"Your wallet must possess great power of attraction," said Orso.

"Not at all; but if I were to write, as others have done, to a wealthy man: 'I want a hundred francs,' he would make haste and send them. But I am a man of honour, lieutenant."

"Do you know, M. della Rebbia," said the bandit whom his comrade called the parson, "Do you know that, in this country of simple habits, there are nevertheless to be found a few wretches who take advantage of the respect which we inspire by means of our passports," (pointing to his gun), "to cash bills of exchange by counterfeiting our handwriting?"

"I know it," replied Orso abruptly. "But what bills of exchange?"

"Six months ago," continued the bandit, "I was strolling in the neighbourhood of Orezza, when a clodhopper came up to me, cap in hand, and said: 'Ah! sir, excuse me, give me time, I have not got more than fifty-five francs, but, in truth, that is all I can scrape together.' I was quite surprised, and said, 'What do you mean, you ragamuffin! by your fifty-five francs?'—'I mean sixty-five,' replied he; 'but it will be impossible for me to furnish the hundred which you demand.' 'What, you

villain! I demand a hundred francs of you? I don't even know you!' Then he gave me a letter, or rather a dirty scrap of paper, on which he was ordered to deposit a hundred francs in a place indicated, under pain of having his house burned and his cows killed by Giocanto Castriconi,—that's my name. Some one had had the impudence to counterfeit my signature. But what disgusted me most of all was that the letter was written in *patois*, full of bad spelling, as if I should commit faults of orthography! I who carried off all the prizes at the university! I began by giving my clodpole a box on the ear which made him reel again. 'Ah! you take me for a robber, scamp that you are!' said I, administering at the same time a good kick, you know where. This relieved me a little; and I inquired: 'When must you take this money to the appointed place?'—'This very day.'—'Very good; take it there at once.' It was at the foot of a pine-tree, and the spot was admirably suited to the purpose. He took the money, buried it at the foot of the tree, and returned to me. I lay in ambush in the neighbourhood. I waited there with my peasant for six mortal hours; but I assure you, M. della Rebbia, I would have

remained three days, if it had been necessary. At the end of six hours appeared a *Bastiaccio*,\* an infamous usurer. He stooped down to get the money, I fired, and I took such good aim that as he fell his head knocked against the crown-pieces which he was disinterring. 'Now, you vagabond!' said I to the peasant, 'take your money, and never venture again to suspect Giocanto Castriconi of a base action.' The poor devil, trembling from head to foot, picked up his sixty-five francs without taking the trouble to wipe them. He thanked me very gratefully. I gave him another kick by way of farewell, and he ran all the way home without stopping."

"Ah! parson," said Brandolaccio, "I envy you that shot. It must have made you roar with laughter."

"I had hit the *Bastiaccio* on the temple," continued the bandit, "and that reminded me of these lines of Virgil:

. . . Liquefacto tempora plumbo  
Diffidit, ac multâ porrectum extendit arenâ.

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\* The Corsican mountaineers detest the inhabitants of Bastia, and do not look upon them as fellow-countrymen. They never say *Bastiese*, but always *Bastiaccio*; and it is well known that the termination in *accio* is indicative of supreme contempt.

*Liquefacto* ! Do you think, Monsieur Orso, that a leaden bullet becomes melted by the rapidity of its passage through the air ? As you have studied the science of balistics, you will be able to tell me whether this is an error or a truth."

Orso would have preferred to discuss this question rather than hold an argument with the licentiate on the morality of his action. Brandolaccio, however, who was not fond of such scientific dissertations, put a stop to the conversation by remarking that the sun was about to set. "As you would not dine with us, Ors' Anton'," he continued, "I would advise you not to keep Miss Colomba waiting any longer. And then, it is not always safe to walk abroad after sunset. Why do you come out without your gun ? There are wicked folks in the neighbourhood ; beware of them. To-day you have nothing to fear ; the Barricini have the Prefect staying with them ; they met him on the road, and he intends to spend a day at Pietranera before he goes to lay the first stone of some new building at Corte. To-night he sleeps at the house of the Barricini ; but to-morrow they will be free. Young Vincentello is a regular scape-grace, and Orlan-duccio is little better. Try and meet them sepa-



rately, one to-day, and the other to-morrow ; but be on your guard, that's all I have to say."

"Thank you for your advice," said Orso, "but we have no quarrels to settle together ; and until they come in search of me, I shall have nothing to say to them."

The bandit clicked his tongue ironically, but made no answer. Orso rose to depart. "By the way," said Brandolaccio, "I have not thanked you for your gunpowder ; it came very opportunely. Now, I am in want of nothing except a pair of shoes, but I will make myself a pair out of a mouflon's skin one of these days."

Orso slipped two five-franc pieces into the bandit's hand. "It was Colomba who sent you the powder ; here is some money to buy a pair of shoes."

"No nonsense, if you please, lieutenant," exclaimed Brandolaccio, returning the coins. "Do you take me for a beggar ? I accept bread and powder, but nothing else."

"I should have thought old comrades might help one another without giving offence," said Orso. "Good bye." But before he left, he slipped the money into the bandit's wallet without his perceiving it.

"Farewell, Ors' Anton'," said the theologian. "We shall perhaps meet again in the *mdquis* one of these days, and then we will resume our studies of Virgil."

Orso had left his honest companions for about a quarter of an hour, when he heard a man running after him at full speed. It was Brandolaccio.

"This is past a joke, lieutenant," cried he, out of breath, "quite past a joke! here are your ten francs. From another person I would not endure such a trick. Many compliments from me to Miss Colomba. You have made me quite out of breath! Good night."

## CHAPTER XII.

ORSO found Colomba in some alarm at his long absence; but, on seeing him return in safety, she resumed that appearance of melancholy serenity which was her habitual characteristic. During the evening meal, they conversed only on indifferent subjects, and Orso, emboldened by his sister's calmness, related to her his adventure with the bandits, and even ventured a few jokes upon the moral and religious education which little Chilina was likely to receive under the care of her uncle and his honourable colleague, the licentiate Castriconi.

"Brandolaccio is an honest fellow," said Colomba; "but as for Castriconi, I have heard it said that he is a man of no principle."

"I think," said Orso, "that he is just as

good as Brandolaccio, and that Brandolaccio is no better than he. Both of them are at open war with society. The commission of a first crime involves them daily in fresh offences; and yet, perhaps, they are not so guilty as many persons who do not live in the *mâquis*."

A flush of joy lighted up his sister's countenance.

"Yes," continued Orso, "these poor fellows have a kind of honour of their own. A cruel prejudice, and not base cupidity, has driven them to adopt the life which they are leading."

Colomba was silent for a few moments.

"My brother," she said, as she gave him his coffee, "perhaps you know that Charles Baptiste Pietri died last night. He died of the marsh fever."

"Who is this Pietri?"

"He is a man of this town, the husband of Madeleine, who received the pocket-book from our dying father. His widow came to beg me to attend his wake, and to sing something. It would be kind of you to come also. They are our neighbours, and it is an act of politeness which cannot be neglected in a small town like ours."

"Confound the politeness, Colomba! I don't like my sister to make a show of herself for the amusement of the public."

"Orso," replied Colomba gravely, "every one honours the dead in his own way. The *ballata* has been transmitted to us from our ancestors, and we are bound to respect it as an ancient usage. Madeleine has not the gift of improvisation, and old Fiordispina, who is the best *voceratrice* in the country, is ill. There must be some one to sing the *ballata*."

"Do you think that Charles Baptiste won't find his way into the other world, unless some one sings bad verses over his bier? Go to the wake if you please, Colomba; I will come with you, as you seem to desire it; but do not improvise—it is unbecoming at your age, and—I beg you will not, my sister."

"My brother, I have promised. It is the custom here, as you know; and I tell you again, I am the only person in the village who can improvise."

"Deuce take the custom!"

"It pains me a great deal to sing in this way. It reminds me of all our misfortunes. To-morrow I shall be ill; but it must be done. Do not forbid me to do it, brother. Remember

that at Ajaccio you told me to improvise, to amuse that English girl who laughs at our old customs. May I not, then, improvise to-day, to please poor people who will thank me for it, and whom it will assist to endure their grief?"

"Well, do as you please. I'll wager that you have composed your *ballata* already, and you don't want to waste it."

"No, I could not compose one beforehand, my brother. I stand in front of the corpse, and I think of those who are left behind. Tears come into my eyes, and then I sing whatever occurs to my mind."

All this was said with such simplicity that it was impossible to attribute to Colomba the slightest poetical self-consciousness. Orso yielded, and accompanied his sister to Pietri's house. The dead body lay on a table, with the face uncovered, in the largest room. All the doors and windows were open, and several wax candles were burning round the table. At the head of the corpse stood the widow, and behind her, a large number of women occupied one end of the room. At the other end stood the men, with heads uncovered, and eyes fixed upon the dead body, observing profound

silence. Each new comer approached the table, kissed the corpse,\* bowed to the widow and her son, and then took a place in the circle without uttering a word. From time to time, however, one of those present would break the solemn silence by addressing a few words to the deceased. "Why didst thou leave thy good wife?" inquired one of the women. "Did she not take good care of thee? Of what didst thou stand in need? Why didst thou not wait another month? thy daughter-in-law would have given thee a son."

A fine young man, the son of Pietri, clasping the cold hand of his father, exclaimed, "Oh! why didst thou not die by the *mala morte*?† We would have avenged thee!"

These were the first words which Orso heard as he entered the room. On seeing him, the circle opened, and a faint murmur of curiosity announced that the expectations of the assembly were excited by the presence of the voceratrice. Colomba embraced the widow, took her by the hand, and remained for a few minutes in meditation, with her eyes fixed on the ground. Then she threw back her mezzaro, looked

\* This custom still subsisted at Bocognano in 1840.

† *Mala morte*, violent death.

fixedly at the dead man, and bending over the corpse, with a face almost as pale as his, she thus began :

“ Charles Baptiste ! may Christ receive thy soul !—To live is to suffer.—Thou art gone to a place—where is neither sun nor cold.—Thou wilt no longer need thy hedge-bill—nor thy heavy mattock.—No more labour wilt thou do.—Henceforth, all thy days are Sabbaths.—Charles Baptiste ! may Christ possess thy soul !—Thy son governs thy house.—I have seen an oak-tree fall—withered by the Libeccio.—I thought that it was dead.—But I passed again—and its root had put forth a sapling.—The sapling has become an oak—with spreading shade.—Under its stout branches, Maddelè, rest thyself—and think of the oak that is no more.”

Here Madeleine began to sob aloud, and two or three men who, if need required, would have shot Christians with as little compunction as partridges, brushed away large tear-drops from their sun-burnt cheeks.

Colomba continued for some time in the same strain, addressing herself sometimes to the deceased, sometimes to his family, and occasionally, by a *prosopopœia* frequently em-



ployed in *ballate*, making the dead man himself speak to console or counsel his friends. As she proceeded with her improvisation, her countenance assumed a sublime expression; her complexion became suffused with a roseate tint, which contrasted strongly with the brilliant whiteness of her teeth, and the fiery sparkle of her dilated eyeballs. She looked like a Pythoness on her tripod. With the exception of a few stifled sighs and sobs, not the slightest murmur was to be heard among the crowd which thronged around her. Although less accessible than the others to the influence of this wild poetry, Orso soon felt himself affected by the general emotion. Retiring to a corner of the room, he wept as bitterly as the son of Pietri himself.

All at once a slight movement took place among the audience: the circle opened, and several strangers entered. By the respect which was shown them, and the anxiety with which every one made way for them, it was evident that they were persons of importance, whose visit did singular honour to the house. Nevertheless, out of respect to the ballata, no one spoke a word to them. The person who had entered first appeared to be about forty

years of age. His black dress, the red ribbon in his button-hole, the air of confidence and authority which pervaded his whole appearance, announced the Prefect of the department. Behind him came a crook-backed old man, of bilious complexion, whose green spectacles imperfectly concealed the timid and anxious expression of his eyes. He wore a black coat, much too large for him, and which, though still quite new, had evidently been made several years before. Standing close beside the Prefect, it seemed as though he wished to take refuge in his shadow. Lastly, after him, came two young men, of high stature, and sun-burnt complexion, with cheeks buried under bushy whiskers, and proud, arrogant eyes, indicative of impertinent curiosity. Orso had had time to forget the physiognomies of most of the inhabitants of his village; but the sight of the old man in green spectacles at once awakened recollections of bygone times. His presence in company with the Prefect was sufficient to make him known. It was the advocate Barri-cini, the mayor of Pietranera, who had come with his two sons to show the Prefect the performance of a ballata. It would be difficult to define the feelings which passed at this moment

through Orso's mind; but the presence of his father's enemy caused him to experience a sensation of horror, and he felt himself more than ever accessible to the suspicions which he had long endeavoured to reject.

As for Colomba, at sight of the man to whom she had vowed mortal hatred, her changeful countenance at once assumed a sinister expression. She grew pale; her voice became hoarse, and the verse which she had commenced died upon her lips. But ere long, resuming her ballata, she continued with fresh vehemence:

“When the sparrow-hawk laments—before its empty nest,—the starlings fly around—insulting its grief.”

Here a stifled laugh was heard: it proceeded from the two sons of the advocate, who doubtless thought that the metaphor was rather too bold.

“The sparrow-hawk will rouse itself—it will spread its wings—and wash its beak in blood!—And to thee, Charles Baptiste! let thy friends—address their last farewell.—Their tears have flowed enough.—The poor orphan alone will not lament thee.—Why should she bewail thy fate?—Thou hast fallen asleep, full of days—

in the midst of thy family—prepared to appear—before the Almighty.—The orphan laments her father,—surprised by base assassins,—stricken from behind ;—her father whose blood is red—on the heap of green leaves.—But she has gathered up his blood—his noble and innocent blood ;—she has shed it over Pietranera—that it might become a mortal poison.—And Pietranera shall remain marked—until a guilty blood—shall have effaced the stain of the innocent blood.”

As she concluded these words, Colomba sank back into a chair, drew her mezzaro' over her face, and sobbed violently. The women, in tears, thronged round the improvisatrice ; many of the men cast threatening looks upon the mayor and his sons ; and the old men murmured against the scandal which they had occasioned by their presence. Young Pietri hastened through the crowd to request the mayor to leave the house without delay ; but Barricini had not waited to be asked to go. He was hurrying to the door, and his two sons were already in the street. The Prefect addressed a few words of condolence to the widow and her son, and followed the mayor almost immediately. Orso went up to his sister, took

her by the arm, and led her from the room. "Accompany them," said young Pietri to some of his friends. "Take care that no harm comes to them." Two or three stout fellows hastily placed their stiletos in the left sleeve of their waistcoats, and escorted Orso and his sister to their home.

## CHAPTER XIII.

COLOMBA, panting and exhausted, was utterly unable to speak a word. Her head rested on her brother's shoulder, and she held one of his hands tightly clasped within her own. Although he was inwardly very displeased with her for her peroration, Orso was too much alarmed to give the slightest expression to his displeasure. He was silently awaiting the termination of the nervous crisis under which she seemed to be labouring, when he heard a knock at the door; and presently Saveria entered in great excitement, announcing, "Monsieur le Préfet!" At this name Colomba arose as if ashamed of her weakness, and stood with her hands resting on a chair, which trembled visibly beneath her pressure.

The Prefect began with some common-place apologies for the untimely hour of his visit,

expressed his sympathy for Mademoiselle Colomba, spoke of the danger of giving vent to strong emotions, condemned the custom of funeral lamentations, which, he said, were rendered all the more painful to the spectators by the talent of the voceratrice; and adroitly slipped in a slight disapproval of the tendency of the last improvisation. Then, changing his tone, he said :

“ M. della Rebbia, I have many kind messages for you from your English friends. Miss Nevil desired to be especially remembered to your sister; and I have a letter from her for you.”

“ A letter from Miss Nevil?” exclaimed Orso.

“ Unfortunately I have not brought it in my pocket, but you shall have it in five minutes. Her father has been unwell. We were almost afraid that he had caught one of our terrible fevers; but he is now convalescent, as you will soon be able to judge for yourself. He will be here in a few days, I should think.”

“ Miss Nevil must have been greatly alarmed?”

“ Fortunately she was not aware of the danger until all cause for alarm had been removed. Miss Nevil talked to me a great deal

about your sister and yourself, M. della Rebbia."

Orso bowed.

"She seems to entertain a strong friendship for you both. Under a graceful exterior, and beneath an appearance of levity, she conceals the most perfect good sense."

"She is a charming person," said Orso.

"It was partly at her request that I came hither, sir. No one is better acquainted than myself with a fatal story, of which I wish that I were not obliged to remind you. As M. Baricini is still the mayor of Pietranera, and I have the honour to be the Prefect of this department, I need not tell you what little value I attach to certain suspicions which, if I am rightly informed, some imprudent persons have communicated to you, and which you have rejected, I know, with all the indignation that might be expected of a gentleman of your position and character."

"Colomba," said Orso, fidgetting on his chair, "you are very tired. Had you not better go to bed?"

Colomba shook her head negatively. She had regained her habitual calmness, and kept her eyes fixed earnestly on the Prefect.



“M. Barricini,” continued the Prefect, “earnestly desires the cessation of that kind of enmity—that is to say, of that state of uncertainty in which you are placed in reference to each other; and, for my part, I should be delighted to see you on those terms of friendship which ought to subsist between individuals so capable of appreciating——”

“Sir,” interrupted Orso, with emotion, “I have never accused the advocate Barricini of having assassinated my father, but he has been guilty of an action which will prevent me from ever being on friendly terms with him. He forged a threatening letter in the name of a certain bandit—or, at least, he ascribed it, in an underhand manner, to my father. That letter, sir, was probably the indirect cause of his death.”

The Prefect reflected for a moment.

“That your father believed this, when, influenced by the impetuosity of his character, he instituted an action-at-law against M. Barricini, was quite excusable; but such blindness on your part is no longer allowable. Just consider that Barricini had no interest in forging this letter—I will say nothing of his character—you do not know him, and you are preju-

diced against him—but you cannot for a moment suppose that a man well acquainted with the laws ——”

“But, sir,” said Orso, rising, “pray remember that to tell me that this letter was not the work of M. Barricini, is to ascribe it to my father. His honour, sir, is mine.”

“No one,” answered the Prefect, “can be more convinced than I am of the honour of Colonel della Rebbia—but—the author of that letter is now known.”

“Who is he?” exclaimed Colomba, advancing towards the Prefect.

“A miserable wretch, guilty of numerous crimes—of those crimes which you Corsicans never pardon—a thief, named Tomaso Bianchi, now a prisoner in the gaol at Bastia, has confessed that he was the author of that fatal letter.”

“I do not know the man,” said Orso. “What could have been his object?”

“He is a man from this neighbourhood,” said Colomba, “the brother of one of our old millers. He is a scoundrel and a liar, unworthy of belief.”

“You shall see,” continued the Prefect, “what motives he had for the commission of this

crime. The miller, of whom your sister speaks—whose name, I think, was Theodore—rented from the Colonel a mill, situated on that water-course, the possession of which by your father was disputed by M. Barricini. The Colonel, with his usual generosity, derived scarcely any profit from the mill. Now, Tomaso thought that if M. Barricini obtained possession of the water-course, he would have to pay a considerable rent for the mill, as it is well known that M. Barricini is very fond of money. In short, to oblige his brother, Tomaso counterfeited the handwriting of the bandit; and there the story ends. You know that family ties are so powerful in Corsica, that they sometimes lead to the commission of crimes. Have the kindness to read this letter which I have received from the Procureur-general on the subject; it will confirm what I have just told you.”

Orso glanced at the letter, which contained a detailed account of Tomaso's confessions; and Colomba read it at the same time over her brother's shoulder.

When she had finished, she exclaimed :

“Orlanduccio Barricini went to Bastia about a month ago, when it was known that my

brother was coming back. He must have seen Tomaso, and bribed him to tell this falsehood."

"Mademoiselle," said the Prefect, impatiently, "you explain everything by odious conjectures; is that the right way to arrive at the truth? You, sir, are more reasonable; tell me, what do you think of this explanation? Do you believe, with your sister, that a man who had only a trifling sentence to anticipate would frivolously expose himself to the penalties of forgery, in order to oblige a person whom he does not know?"

Orso read the letter of the Procureur-general over again, weighing each word with extraordinary attention; for, since he had seen the advocate Barricini, he found it more difficult to convince himself than it had been a few days before. At length he was constrained to admit that the explanation appeared perfectly satisfactory. But Colomba exclaimed vehemently:

"Tomaso Bianchi is a knave! He will either not be condemned, or he will escape from prison, I am sure."

The Prefect shrugged his shoulders.

"I have now communicated to you," said he to Orso, "all the information which I have

received. I now withdraw, and leave you to your reflections. I feel confident that your reason will convince you of the truth of what I have stated, and I hope that it will be more powerful than the — conjectures of your sister."

Orso, after a few apologies for Colomba's unbelief, repeated that he now believed that Tomaso was the only guilty person.

The Prefect rose to take his leave.

"If it were not so late," he said, "I would propose to you to come with me and fetch Miss Nevil's letter. At the same time you might say to M. Barricini what you have just said to me, and the quarrel will be at an end."

"Never shall Orso della Rebbia enter the house of a Barricini!" exclaimed Colomba, impetuously.

"Mademoiselle is the *tintinajo*\* of the family, as it appears," said the Prefect, banteringly.

"Sir," said Colomba, in a firm tone, "you are deceived. You do not know the advocate. He is the most cunning, the most deceitful of

\* *Tintinajo*, the bell-wether. This name is also given, metaphorically, to that member of a family who directs it in all important affairs.

men. I beseech you, do not induce Orso to commit an action which would cover him with shame."

"Colomba!" cried Orso, "passion makes you rave."

"Orso! Orso! by the sacred box which I placed in your hands, listen to me, I conjure you. Between you and the Barricini there is blood; you shall not go to their house!"

"My sister!"

"No, my brother, you shall not go; or, if you do, I will leave this house, and you will never see me more. Orso, have pity upon me!"

And she fell on her knees before him.

"I am quite grieved," said the Prefect, "to find Mdlle. della Rebbia so extremely unreasonable. You will convince her of her mistake, I am sure."

He opened the door and paused, as if expecting Orso to follow him.

"I cannot leave her now," said Orso. "Tomorrow, if——"

"I go away early in the morning," said the Prefect.

"At least, my brother," cried Colomba,

clasping her hands, "wait until to-morrow morning. Give me time to look over my father's papers. You cannot refuse me that."

"Well! you shall see them this evening, but at all events, you must never vex me again by your extravagant hatred. A thousand pardons, M. le Préfet—I do not feel very calm myself. It had better be left till to-morrow."

"*La nuit porte conseil*," said the Prefect, retiring. "I hope that to-morrow all your irresolution will have ceased."

"Saveria," exclaimed Colomba, "take the lantern and accompany Monsieur le Prefect. He will give you a letter for my brother."

She added a few words, which Saveria alone heard.

"Colomba," said Orso, when the Prefect had gone, "you have given me a great deal of pain. Will you always refuse to listen to evidence?"

"You have given me until to-morrow," she replied. "I have very little time, but I still hope."

Then she took a bunch of keys and ran up stairs to a room at the top of the house. Pre-

sently Orso heard her hastily opening the drawers of a secretary, in which Colonel della Rebbia used formerly to keep his papers of importance.



## CHAPTER XIV.

SAVERIA was absent for a long while, and Orso's impatience had reached its climax when at length she returned, bearing the letter, and followed by little Chilina, who was rubbing her eyes, for she had been awakened out of her first sleep.

"My child," said Orso, "what brings you here at this late hour?"

"Your sister sent for me, sir," answered Chilina.

"What the deuce does she want with her?" thought Orso; but he hastened to unseal Miss Lydia's letter, and while he was reading it, Chilina went up stairs to his sister.

"My father has been rather poorly, sir," wrote Miss Nevil, "and he is, moreover, so averse to correspondence, that I am obliged to act as his secretary. The other day, as you

know, he wetted his feet on the sea-shore instead of admiring the landscape with us, and that was quite enough to give him a fever in your charming island. I fancy I can see your cross looks as you read this; and I dare say you feel for your stiletto, but I hope you no longer wear one. At all events, my father had a slight fever, and I was greatly alarmed; but the Prefect, whom I persist in considering a very agreeable person, sent in a very agreeable doctor, who, in two days, delivered us from our anxiety; the attack has not made its appearance again, and my father wants to go out hunting already, but I forbid it for the present. How did you find your castle among the mountains? Does your northern tower still stand in the same place? Are there plenty of ghosts? I ask you all these questions, because my father remembers that you promised that he should hunt deer, wild-boars, and mouflons—is that the right name of that strange animal? On our way to Bastia, we intend to trespass upon your hospitality, and I hope that Della Rebbia Castle, which, you say, is so old and dilapidated, will not tumble down upon our heads. Although the Prefect is so pleasant, that, while with him, I was never at

a loss for a subject of conversation, I flatter myself, by-the-by, that I have turned his brain. We talked a good deal about your lordship. The lawyers of Bastia have sent him certain revelations which have been made by a prisoner in the gaol there, which are calculated to destroy your last suspicions; so your enmity, which used at one time to alarm me, must henceforward cease. You have no idea how glad I am that it is so. When you set off with the beautiful voceratrice, with your gun in your hand, and looking so gloomy, you appeared to me more Corsican than usual—too Corsican even. *Basta!* I have written all this, because I don't know what else to do. The Prefect is going away, alas! We shall send you a message as soon as we start for your mountains, and I shall take the liberty to write to Mademoiselle Colomba to request a bruccio, *ma solenne*. Meanwhile, say a thousand kind things to her for me. I make great use of her stiletto to cut the leaves of a novel which I brought with me; but the terrible instrument is indignant at being employed in such base service, and tears my book in a pitiable fashion. Good bye, sir; my father sends you his best love! Listen to the Prefect,

he is a sensible man, and is coming out of his way, I think, on your account. He is going to lay a foundation-stone at Corte; I imagine that it will be a very imposing ceremony, and I greatly regret that I shall not witness it. A gentleman in an embroidered coat, with silk stockings and a white scarf, holding a trowel!—and, then, a speech; and the termination of the affair by all the people shouting *Vive le roi!* a thousand times over. You will be very proud of having made me fill all four pages; but I've nothing else to do, sir, as I said before, and, for the same reason, I permit you to write me a very long answer. By the way, I think it rather extraordinary that you have not yet informed me of your safe arrival at Pietranera Castle.

LYDIA."

"P.S.—I hope you will listen to the Prefect, and do whatever he tells you. We agreed together that you should adopt his suggestions, so I hope you will do so."

Orso read this letter two or three times over, mentally accompanying each perusal with innumerable commentaries; then he wrote a long answer, and told Saveria to take it to a

man in the village who was going to start that very evening for Ajaccio. Already he had quite forgotten his intention of discussing with his sister their true or false causes of complaint against the Barricini; Miss Lydia's letter made everything appear to him *en couleur de rose*; he no longer indulged in either suspicions or hatred. After having waited for some time for his sister to come down, and finding that she did not make her appearance, he went to bed, with a lighter heart than he had had for a long while. After having dismissed Chilina with secret instructions, Colomba spent the greater part of the night in perusing old papers. A little before daybreak, a few small pebbles were thrown against her window; at this signal, she went down into the garden, opened a private door, and introduced into the house two very ill-looking men; her first care was to take them to the kitchen, and give them plenty to eat. Who these men were, we shall presently see.

## CHAPTER XV.

At about six o'clock the next morning, one of the Prefect's servants knocked at the door of Orso's house. It was opened by Colomba, and he told her that the Prefect was ready to depart, but was waiting for her brother. Colomba replied unhesitatingly that her brother had slipped down the staircase and sprained his foot; and that, as he was quite unable to move a step, he begged the Prefect to excuse him, and would be very grateful if he would have the kindness to call upon him. A few minutes after this message had been despatched, Orso came down stairs, and asked his sister whether the Prefect had not sent for him.

"He begs you to wait for him here," she replied with the greatest assurance.

Half an hour elapsed before any movement

was perceived in the direction of M. Barricini's house; and meanwhile, Orso inquired of Colomba whether she had made any fresh discoveries. She replied that she would give her explanations in presence of the Prefect; she affected great calmness, but her heightened colour and sparkling eyes betokened great febrile agitation.

At length, the door of M. Barricini's house was seen to open; and the Prefect, in travelling costume, came forth, followed by the Mayor and his two sons. Great was the astonishment of the inhabitants of Pietranera, who had been on the watch ever since sunrise, in order to witness the departure of the chief magistrate of the department, when they saw him, accompanied by the three Barricini, walk straight across the public square, and enter the house of the Della Rebbias.

"They have made peace!" exclaimed the politicians of the village.

"I told you so," added an old man. "Orso Antonio has lived too long on the Continent to settle his affairs as a brave man should."

"Nevertheless," replied a Rebbianist, "observe that it is the Barricini who go to him. They beg pardon."

"It's the Prefect who has been humbugging them all," answered the old man. "But nobody has any courage now-a-days, and our young men care about as much for their father's blood as if they were all bastards."

The Prefect was not a little surprised to find Orso standing and walking about without difficulty. Colomba, however, at once admitted her falsehood, and begged pardon for it.

"If you had been staying anywhere else, sir," she said to the Prefect, "my brother would have called upon you yesterday to pay his respects."

Orso excused himself as best he could, protesting that he was utterly ignorant of this ridiculous trick, which caused him deep mortification. The Prefect and old Barricini seemed to believe in the sincerity of his regret, as it was justified by his confusion and the reproaches which he addressed to his sister; but the sons of the mayor did not appear to be satisfied.

"They are making fools of us," said Orlanduccio, loud enough to be heard.

"If my sister were to play me such a trick," said Vincentello, "I'll warrant she should never repeat it."



These words, and the tone in which they were uttered, displeased Orso, and banished a great part of his good will. He exchanged looks with the young Barricini which were indicative of no friendly feeling.

Meanwhile all the company had sat down, with the exception of Colomba, who remained standing near the door of the kitchen. The Prefect then began, and, after a few common-places on the prejudices of the country, reminded his hearers that many of the most inveterate enmities had originated in misapprehension. Then, turning to the Mayor, he told him that M. della Rebbia had never believed that the Barricini family had taken any part, either directly or indirectly, in the deplorable event which had deprived him of his father; that he had, indeed, entertained some doubts relating to a particular in the lawsuit which had been carried on between the two families; that this doubt, however, was rendered excusable by M. Orso's long absence, and by the nature of the information which he had received; but that, now it had been cleared up by recent explanations, he considered himself perfectly satisfied, and desired to establish relations of friendship and

neighbourliness with M. Barricini and his sons.

Orso bowed constrainedly; M. Barricini stammered a few words which nobody heard; and his sons looked up at the beams of the ceiling. The Prefect, continuing his harangue, was about to address to Orso the counterpart of what he had just stated to M. Barricini, when Colomba, taking some papers from her bosom, advanced gravely between the contracting parties.

"It would give me very heartfelt pleasure," she said, "to witness the termination of the strife between our two families; but in order for the reconciliation to be sincere, we must have everything explained, and leave nothing in doubt. Monsieur le Prefect," she continued, "the declaration of Tomaso Bianchi was justly suspected by me, coming as it did from a man of such notoriously bad character. I said that the sons of M. Barricini had probably seen this man in the prison at Bastia——"

"It is false," interrupted Orlanduccio, "I have not seen him."

Colomba glanced contemptuously at him, and continued with great apparent calmness:

"You explained the interest which Tomaso might have to threaten M. Barricini in the name of a dreaded bandit, by his desire to maintain his brother Theodore in possession of the mill which he rented of my father at a low rate."

"That is evident," observed the Prefect.

"I am surprised at no base action on the part of such a scoundrel as this Bianchi seems to be," said Orso, deceived by his sister's air of moderation.

"The counterfeited letter," continued Colomba, whose eyes began to sparkle with unusual brilliancy, "is dated on the 10th of July. Tomaso was then at the mill, with his brother."

"Yes," said the mayor, in some disquietude.

"What interest could Tomaso then have had to forge it?" exclaimed Colomba, triumphantly. "His brother's lease had expired; my father had given him notice to quit on the 1st of July. Here is my father's register, containing a copy of the notice to quit, and a letter from a person at Ajaccio proposing a new tenant."

So saying, she gave to the Prefect the papers which she held in her hand.

There was a general movement of surprise. The Mayor visibly turned pale. Orso, knitting his brow, stepped forward to look at the papers which the Prefect was reading with great attention.

"They are making fools of us!" again exclaimed Orlanduccio, rising angrily from his seat. "Let us begone, my father; we never ought to have come hither!"

An instant enabled M. Barricini to recover his self-possession. He requested permission to examine the papers; the Prefect handed them to him without saying a word. Then, placing his green spectacles across his nose, he perused them with an air of considerable indifference, whilst Colomba watched him with the eyes of a tigress who sees a deer approaching the den of her whelps.

"But," said M. Barricini, removing his spectacles and returning the papers to the Prefect, "knowing the good nature of the late Colonel—Tomaso thought—indeed, must have thought—that the Colonel would repent of his resolution to give him notice to quit. In fact, he did remain in possession of the mill ←and so——"

"It was I," said Colomba, in a contempt.

uous tone, "who gave him permission to remain. My father was dead, and in my position, I found it necessary not to offend the clients of my family."

"At all events," said the Prefect, "this Tomaso admits that he wrote the letter,—that is clear."

"It is clear to me," interrupted Orso, "that there is a great deal of infamous conduct concealed in the whole of this affair."

"I have again to contradict another assertion of these gentlemen," said Colomba.

She opened the kitchen door, and Brandaccio immediately entered the room, followed by the licentiate in theology and the dog Brusco. The two bandits were unarmed, at least apparently; they had their cartridge-box at their waistband, but not the pistol which is its necessary accompaniment. On entering the room, they took off their caps respectfully.

It was curious to observe the effect produced by their sudden appearance. The mayor nearly fell backwards in terror; but his sons sprang bravely before him, thrusting their hands into their pockets in search of their stilettos. The Prefect made a movement towards the door,

whilst Orso, seizing Brandolaccio by the collar, exclaimed: "What are you doing here, you rascal?"

"It is an ambuscade!" cried the mayor, attempting to open the door; but Saveria had double-locked it on the outside, by order of the bandits, as it afterwards proved.

"Good people!" said Brandolaccio, "don't be afraid of me; I am not so black a devil as I'm painted. We have no bad intentions. Monsieur le Préfet, your most obedient. Gently, lieutenant, if you please; you're strangling me. We have come here as witnesses. Come, parson, speak out; you've got the gift of the gab."

"Monsieur le Préfet," said the licentiate, "I have not the honour of your acquaintance. My name is Giocanto Castriconi; but I am better known as the Parson. Ah! you recognize me! very good. Mademoiselle della Rebbia, with whom I was equally unacquainted until this morning, has requested me to give you some information regarding a certain Tomaso Bianchi, with whom I was confined, about three weeks since, in the prison of Bastia. This is what I have to tell you——"

"You need not trouble yourself any fur-

ther," said the Prefect; "I cannot admit the testimony of such a man as you. M. della Rebbia, I am happy to believe that you have no share in this odious conspiracy. But are you master in your own house? Order your servant to open this door. Your sister will possibly have to explain the strange relations which she appears to maintain with bandits."

"Monsieur le Préfet," cried Colomba, "I beseech you to hear what this man has to say. You are here to render justice to all, and your duty is to seek after the truth. Speak, Giocanto Castriconi."

"Don't listen to him!" exclaimed the three Barricini in chorus.

"If you all speak at once," said the bandit with a smile, "nobody will get a hearing. In prison, as I said before, I had as my companion, not as my friend, the Tomaso in question. He used to receive frequent visits from M. Orlanduccio——"

"It is false," exclaimed both the brothers simultaneously.

"Two negatives make an affirmative," good-humouredly remarked Castriconi. "Tomaso had plenty of money; he ate and drank of

the best. I have always been fond of good cheer—indeed, it is one of my little weaknesses—and, notwithstanding my repugnance to associate with this rascal, I allowed myself to dine with him several times. Out of gratitude, I proposed to him to escape with me.—A little wench—to whom I had been very kind, had supplied me with the means of doing so. But I must compromise no one. Tomaso refused my offer, told me that he was sure to be acquitted,—that Advocate Barricini had recommended him to all the judges, and that he would come off as white as snow, and with his pockets full of money. As for me, I thought it advisable to take the air. *Dixi.*”

“All that this man has said is utterly false,” resolutely repeated Orlanduccio. “If we were in the open country, each with his gun in his hand, he would not speak thus.”

“What a silly speech!” exclaimed Brandolaccio. “Don’t get into a scrape with the parson, Orlanduccio.”

“Will you allow me to go away, now, Monsieur della Rebbia?” said the Prefect, stamping impatiently.

“Saveria! Saveria!” cried Orso. “Open the door, in the devil’s name!”



"Wait an instant," said Brandolaccio. "We have first of all to vanish, on our side. Monsieur le Préfet, it is customary, when we meet at the house of mutual friends, to give each other half-an-hour's grace on taking leave."

The Prefect looked at him with contempt.

"Your servant, gentlemen all!" said Brandolaccio. Then, extending his arm horizontally, "Come, Brusco," said he to his dog, "jump in honour of his Excellency the Prefect!"

The dog jumped, the bandits hastily regained their weapons in the kitchen, and decamped through the garden: and, on the sound of a shrill whistle, the door of the room opened as if by enchantment.

"M. Barricini," said Orso, with concentrated fury, "I look upon you as a forger. This very day I shall institute proceedings against you for forgery, and for conspiracy with Bianchi. Perhaps I may have another and more terrible accusation to bring against you."

"And I, M. della Rebbia," said the Mayor, "shall proceed against you for ambushade, and for complicity with bandits. Meanwhile, M. le Préfet will doubtless commit you to the gendarmerie."

"The Prefect will do his duty," said that gentleman sternly. "He will take care that public order shall not be disturbed at Pietranera, and he will see that justice is done. I speak to you all, gentlemen!"

The mayor and Vincentello had already left the room, and Orlanduccio was slowly following them, when Orso said to him, in a low tone: "Your father is an old man whom I could crush with a blow; my account must, therefore, be settled with your brother and yourself."

In reply, Orlanduccio drew his stiletto and threw himself furiously upon Orso; but before he could make use of his weapon, Colomba had seized him by the arm, and twisted it violently round, whilst Orso, striking him in the face with his fist, made him fall backwards against the post of the door. The stiletto fell from Orlanduccio's hand, but Vincentello was returning into the room to revenge his brother's defeat, when Colomba, seizing a gun, proved to him that the odds were not equal. Meanwhile the Prefect threw himself between the two combatants.

"We shall meet soon, Ors' Anton'!" cried Orlanduccio; and, violently slamming the door

of the room, he locked it on the outside in order to gain time to effect his retreat.

Orso and the Prefect remained for a quarter of an hour without speaking, each at the opposite end of the room. Colomba, with the pride of triumph on her brow, regarded them alternately, resting on the gun which had decided the victory.

“What a country! what a country!” exclaimed the Prefect at length, rising impetuously from his seat. “M. della Rebbia, you have acted wrongly. I require your word of honour that you will abstain from all violence, and allow justice to decide upon this cursed affair.”

“I grant, M. le Préfet, that I was wrong to strike that rascal; but, after all, I have struck him, and I cannot refuse him the satisfaction which he has demanded.”

“Pooh! pooh! he has no wish to fight with you!—but if he were to assassinate you? You have done quite enough to provoke him to such a deed.”

“We will guard against that,” said Colomba.

“Orlanduccio,” said Orso, “appears to me to be a brave fellow, and I augur better things of him, Monsieur le Préfet. He was very quick in drawing his stiletto, but in his place,

I should probably have done the same; and it is fortunate for me that my sister has not got the wrist of a fine lady."

"You shall not fight!" exclaimed the Prefect. "I forbid it!"

"Allow me to remind you, sir," said Orso, "that, in affairs of honour, I admit no other authority than that of my conscience."

"I tell you that you shall not fight!"

"You may place me under arrest, sir, if you please—that is, if I allow myself to be arrested. But even if you were to do so, you would only postpone a meeting which is now inevitable. You are a man of honour, Monsieur le Préfet, and you well know that it cannot be otherwise."

"If you were to order my brother's arrest," added Colomba, "half the village would take his part, and we should have a pretty skirmish."

"I forewarn you, sir," said Orso, "and I beseech you not to believe that I am uttering a mere bravado—I forewarn you that, if M. Barricini abuses his authority as mayor to order my arrest, I will defend myself."

"From this day forth," said the Prefect, "M. Barricini is suspended from his functions."

He will justify his conduct, I hope. But, sir, I feel an interest in you. What I am going to request is only a small matter: remain quietly at home until my return from Corte. I shall be absent for three days only. I will return with the Procureur-royal, and we will thoroughly investigate this painful affair. Will you promise to abstain from all hostilities until then?"

"I cannot promise it, sir, because I believe that Orlanduccio will demand a meeting."

"What! M. della Rebbia, will you, a French officer, consent to fight with a man whom you suspect of forgery?"

"I have struck him, sir."

"But, if you had struck a galley-slave and he demanded satisfaction, do you mean to say you would fight him? However, I will ask still less of you: do not provoke Orlanduccio. I allow you to accept his challenge if he demands a meeting."

"He will demand one, I have no doubt; but I will promise not to give him any more blows to provoke him to fight me."

"What a country!" repeated the Prefect, walking across the room with rapid strides. "When shall I return to France?"

"Monsieur le Préfet," said Colomba, in her

gentlest accents, "it is getting late; will you do us the honour to breakfast with us?"

The Prefect could not refrain from laughing. "I have stayed here too long already," said he, "and it may be construed into partiality. Deuce take that foundation-stone! I must begone at once. Ah! mademoiselle, what misfortunes you have occasioned, in all probability, this morning!"

"At all events, M. le Prefet," said Orso, "you will do my sister the justice to believe that her convictions are sincere; and I am now sure, that even you believe them to be well founded."

"Farewell, sir," said the Prefect, waving his hand. "I forewarn you that I shall give orders to the brigadier of gendarmerie to watch all your proceedings."

When the Prefect was gone, "Orso," said Colomba, "you are not now on the Continent. Orlanduccio knows nothing about your method of fighting duels, and, besides, he does not deserve to die the death of a brave man."

"Colomba, my dear girl, you are a jewel. I am deeply indebted to you for having saved me an unpleasant cut. Give me your little hand that I may kiss it. But, don't you see,

let me arrange my own plans. There are certain things which even you do not understand. So, let us have some breakfast; and, as soon as the Prefect has fairly started, send for little Chilina, who appears to me to perform the commissions entrusted to her marvellously well. I shall want her to deliver a letter."

Whilst Colomba was superintending the preparations for breakfast, Orso went up to his room, and wrote the following note:

"You must be anxious to meet me: I am no less so. To-morrow morning let us encounter one another at six o'clock in the valley of Acquaviva. I am very skilful with my pistol, so I do not propose that weapon. It is said that you are a good marksman with your gun; let us each take a double-barrel. I will come accompanied by a man from the village. If your brother should wish to accompany you, choose a second witness and let me know. In that case only, I shall bring two seconds.

"ORSO ANTONIO DELLA REBBIA."

The Prefect, after spending an hour with the deputy-mayor, went for a few minutes into the house of the Barricini, and then started

for Corte, escorted by a single gendarme. A quarter of an hour afterwards, Chilina took the foregoing letter, and delivered it to Orlanduccio with her own hands.

The answer was delayed, and did not arrive until the evening. It was signed by M. Baricini the elder, who informed Orso that he should hand over to the Procureur-royal the threatening letter addressed to his son. "Strong in my consciousness of innocence," he added, at the conclusion of his note, "I wait until justice has pronounced upon your calumnies."

Meanwhile, five or six shepherds summoned by Colomba arrived to garrison the tower of the Della Rebbias. Notwithstanding Orso's protestations, *archere* were constructed in the windows looking upon the public square, and during the whole evening, he received offers of service from different persons of the neighbourhood. Among others, a letter arrived from the theologian-bandit, who promised, in his own name and that of Brandolaccio, to interfere if the mayor called in the aid of the gendarmerie. It ended with this postscript:

"Might I venture to inquire what is the opinion of his Excellency the Prefect with re-



gard to the education which my friend has bestowed upon the dog Brusco. Next to Chilina, I do not know a more docile pupil, or one who manifests such anxiety to learn, and such remarkable aptitude."

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE next day passed without hostilities. Both parties remained strictly on the defensive. Orso did not leave his house, and the door of the Barricini was kept constantly shut. The five gendarmes who had been left to garrison Pietranera, spent their time in patrolling up and down the public square, or strolling in the neighbourhood of the village, assisted by the rural policeman,—the solitary representative of the district militia. The deputy-mayor continued to wear his scarf; but, with the exception of the *archere* in the windows of the hostile houses, there was nothing to indicate the existence of a civil war. A Corsican only would have remarked that on the public square, around the green oak-tree, none but women were to be seen.

At supper, Colomba joyously showed to her

brother the following letter, which she had just received from Miss Nevil :

“ MY DEAR MISS COLOMBA,

“ I learn with very great pleasure from your brother's letter, that all your feuds are ended. Pray receive my hearty congratulations. My father can no longer endure Ajaccio, now that your brother is not here, to talk about war, and go shooting with him. We start to-day, and shall sleep to-night at the house of your relative, to whom you have given us a letter of introduction. At about eleven o'clock on the day after to-morrow, I shall come and beg you to let me taste that mountain *bruccio*, which, you say, is so superior to anything they can make in towns.

“ Farewell, dear Miss Colomba,

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ LYDIA NEVIL.”

“ Then she has not received my second letter,” exclaimed Orso.

“ You see, by the date of her note, that Miss Lydia must already have started, when your letter arrived at Ajaccio. Did you tell her not to come?”

“ I told her that we were in a state of siege —which is not, in my opinion, very compatible with the reception of visitors.”

“ Nonsense ! these English are strange people. She told me, on the last night that I passed in her room, that she should be sorry to leave Corsica without having seen a good vendetta. If you like, Orso, we can give her the gratification of beholding an assault upon the house of our enemies.”

“ It’s my belief,” said Orso, “ that Nature made a mistake when she made you a woman, Colomba. You would have been a first-rate soldier.”

“ Perhaps. At all events, I shall prepare my bruccio.”

“ It will be useless. We must send some one to inform them of our position, and prevent them from coming any further.”

“ What ! send a messenger in this weather, that some torrent might carry away both your letter and himself ? . . . How I pity the poor bandits in the storm ! Fortunately, they have good *piloni*\* . . . I’ll tell you what you must do, Orso. If the storm ceases, set out very early to-morrow morning, and get to

\* Cloaks of very thick cloth, furnished with hoods.

our relative's house before your friends are ready to start. You will have no difficulty in doing this, as Miss Lydia always rises late. You will relate to them what has happened; and if they persist in coming, we shall be delighted to receive them."

Orso at once consented to this arrangement; and, after a few moments' silence, Colomba continued:

"Perhaps you think, Orso, that I was joking when I spoke of making an attack upon the house of the Barricini? Do you know that we are quite strong enough to do it, at least two to one? Since the Prefect has suspended the mayor, all the men here are on our side. We could cut them to pieces. It would be easy to manage the affair. If you liked, I would go to the fountain, and insult their women; they would come out,—perhaps—for they are such base cowards!—perhaps they would fire on me from their *archere*—and miss me. There would be a pretext: they would begin the attack. So much the worse for the vanquished; in a brawl, how is it possible to find out those who have done most execution? Trust to your sister, Orso; the long-robcs who are coming will spoil plenty of

paper, and utter many useless words. Nothing will result from it. The old fox will find means to make them see the stars at noonday. Ah! if the Prefect had not put himself in front of Vincentello, there would have been one less."

All this was said with the same calmness as she had displayed a moment before, when speaking of the preparation of the *bruccio*.

Orso was thunderstruck, and sat looking at his sister with mingled fear and admiration.

"My dear Colomba," he said, rising from the table, "you are, I am afraid, the devil in person; but set your mind at rest. If I do not succeed in getting the Barricini hanged, I will find means to punish them in some other manner. *Palla calda u farru freddu!*\* You see that I have not forgotten all my Corsican."

"The quickest means are the best," said Colomba, with a sigh. "Which horse shall you ride to-morrow, Ors' Anton'?"

"The black one. But why do you ask?"

"That he may have a feed of barley."

When Orso had retired to his room, Colomba sent Saveria and the shepherds to bed, and remained alone in the kitchen to prepare the

\* Warm bullet or cold steel; a very common expression.

*bruccio*. From time to time, she listened attentively, and appeared to be waiting impatiently until her brother was asleep. When, at length, she believed him to be asleep, she took a knife, made sure that it was sharp, thrust her little feet into a pair of large slippers, and, without making the slightest noise, went into the garden.

The garden, which was walled all round, led into a large field, enclosed within hedges, in which the horses were kept; for the Corsican horses are not allowed the luxury of a stable. In general, they are turned loose into a field, and left to their own sagacity to provide themselves with food and shelter against cold and rain.

Colomba opened the garden-door with the same precaution, entered into the enclosure, and whistling gently, she was soon surrounded by the horses, to whom she used frequently to bring bread and salt. As soon as the black horse came within her reach, she seized him tightly by the mane, and slit his ear with her knife. The horse made a terrible leap and fled, uttering that shrill cry which acute pain frequently extorts from animals of his species. Satisfied with what she had done, Colomba

was returning into the garden, when Orso opened his window and cried out: "Who goes there?" At the same time, she heard him cock his gun. Fortunately for her safety, the garden-door lay in complete obscurity, and was partially covered by a large fig-tree. Presently, by the intermittent glimmerings which she could perceive in her brother's room, she concluded that he was attempting to light his lamp. She then hastily fastened the garden door, and gliding along the walls, in such a way that her black dress was not distinguishable from the dark foliage of the espaliers, she succeeded in regaining the kitchen a few moments before Orso made his appearance.

"What's the matter?" she inquired, when she saw him.

"I fancied," said Orso, "that I heard some one opening the garden door."

"Impossible. The dog would have barked. But at all events, let us go and see."

Orso walked round the garden, and after having satisfied himself that the outer door was well fastened, he prepared to return to his room, somewhat ashamed of his false alarm.

"I am glad to see, my brother," said Co-



lomba, "that you are becoming prudent, as a person in your position should be."

"You are educating me," said Orso. "Good night!"

At sunrise the next morning Orso was up, and ready to start. His dress was indicative at once of the studied elegance of a lover about to visit his mistress, and of the prudence of a Corsican in vendetta. He wore a blue coat, fitting closely to his person, with a small silver cartridge-box slung across his shoulder by a green silk sash; his stiletto was safely deposited in a side pocket, and he held in his hand his beautiful English rifle, loaded with ball. Whilst he was hastily sipping a cup of coffee which Colomba had prepared for him, one of the shepherds went out to saddle and bridle his horse. Orso and his sister followed him almost immediately, and entered the enclosure. The shepherd had caught the horse, but had dropped both saddle and bridle, and appeared transfixed with horror: whilst the horse, which remembered the wound of the previous night, and feared for his other ear, was rearing, plunging, neighing, and struggling to escape.

"Come, make haste!" cried Orso to the herd.

“ Ah ! Ors’ Anton’ ! ah ! Ors’ Anton’ ! ” exclaimed the shepherd, indulging at the same time in innumerable and interminable imprecations, most of which it would be impossible to translate.

“ Whatever is the matter ? ” inquired Colomba.

All now drew near the horse ; and on seeing him bleeding and with his ear slit, a general exclamation of surprise and indignation arose. It must be remarked that to mutilate an enemy’s horse is, among the Corsicans, at once an act of revenge, a challenge, and a deadly threat. “ Nothing but a bullet can expiate such a crime.” Although Orso, who had lived a long while on the Continent, was less sensible than his friends to the enormity of the outrage, yet, if a Barriciniest had presented himself before him at that moment, it is probable that he would immediately have taken vengeance upon him for an insult which he ascribed to his enemies.

“ The cowardly scoundrels ! ” he exclaimed, “ to revenge themselves upon a poor beast, when they don’t dare to meet me face to face ! ”

“ Why do we wait ? ” exclaimed Colomba, impetuously. “ Shall they come hither and

mutilate our horses, and we not resent the outrage? Are you men?"

"Vengeance!" replied the shepherds. "Let us lead the horse through the village, and make an assault on their house."

"There is an old barn thatched with straw, next door to their tower," said old Polo Griffo, "in half a second I could set it in a blaze."

Another proposed to fetch the ladders from the church steeple; a third, to break through the doors of M. Barricini's house by means of a heavy beam which was lying in the public square, previously to being employed in the construction of some new building. Amidst all these furious propositions the voice of Colomba was heard, announcing to her adherents that, before they set to work, each of them should have a glass of spirits in the kitchen.

Unfortunately, or rather fortunately, the effect which she had hoped would be produced by her cruelty towards the poor horse was lost in great measure upon Orso. He had no doubt that this savage mutilation was the work of one of his enemies, and he particularly suspected Orlanduccio; but he could not believe that that young man, who had been provoked and struck by him, would have effaced his

shame by slitting the ear of a horse. On the contrary, this base and ridiculous revenge increased his contempt for his adversaries, and he now thought, with the Prefect, that such foes were not worthy to measure swords with him. As soon as he could obtain a hearing, he informed his astonished partizans that they must renounce their bellicose intentions, and that a legal tribunal should punish his enemies for their cruelty towards his horse.

“I am the master here,” he added, sternly, “and I intend to be obeyed. The first man who talks about killing or burning, I shall send him at once about his business. Now, let some one saddle the grey horse.”

“What? Orso!” said Colomba, drawing him aside, “will you calmly endure such an atrocious insult? In our father’s lifetime never would the Barricini have dared to mutilate one of our horses.”

“I promise you they shall repent of their insolence; but it is the duty of gendarmes and gaolers to punish wretches who have only courage enough to attack animals. As I have told you, the law-courts shall revenge me upon them—or if not—you will not need to remind me that I am the son ——”

"Patience!" said Colomba, with a sigh.

"Remember, Colomba," continued Orso, "that if at my return I find that any demonstration has been made against the Barricini, I will never forgive you." Then he added, in a gentler tone: "It is very possible, indeed very probable, that I shall return hither with the Colonel and his daughter; so let their rooms be made ready, and prepare a good breakfast, so that our guests may be as comfortable as possible. It is a very good thing, Colomba, to have courage, but it is, perhaps, more womanly to know how to manage a household. Come, kiss me, and be prudent; for my horse is saddled."

"Orso," said Colomba, "you shall not go alone."

"I don't need an escort," said Orso, "and I promise you not to let any one slit my ear."

"Oh! never will I let you travel alone in time of war," exclaimed Colomba. "Ho! Polo Griffo! Gian' Francè! Memmo! take your guns: you must accompany my brother."

After a little discussion, Orso was obliged to resign himself to his fate, and accept an escort. He selected from among the assembled shep-

herds those who had most loudly called for war; and then, after having renewed his injunctions to his sister and the remaining shepherds, he set out on his journey, taking a by-path, in order to avoid the house of the Barricini.

They were already at some distance from Pietranera, and were travelling at a rapid rate, when, on crossing a little brook which ran into a marsh, old Polo Griffo saw several hogs lying comfortably in the mud, enjoying at once the warmth of the sun and the cool freshness of the water. Immediately, taking aim at the fattest, he lodged a bullet in its head, and killed it on the spot. The comrades of the victim jumped up and ran off with surprising velocity; and although another shepherd fired after them, they got safe and sound to a thicket, in which they disappeared.

"What blockheads!" exclaimed Orso. "You take hogs for wild boars."

"Not so, Ors' Anton'," replied Polo Griffo, "but this herd belongs to the advocate, and I want to teach him to mutilate our horses."

"What!" cried Orso, in a transport of rage, "do you imitate the infamous conduct of our enemies! Leave me immediately. I have no

need of your company. You are no use, except to fight against swine. I swear by Heaven that if you dare to follow me, I will break your heads!"

The two shepherds looked at each other in bewilderment. Orso put spurs to his horse, and disappeared at a gallop.

"Well!" said Polo Griffo, "this is fine behaviour! To be treated in this way by the very people whom you are trying to serve! His father, the Colonel, was enraged against you because you once took aim at the advocate.—Great fool! not to let you fire. And the son—you see what I have done for him. He speaks of breaking my head, just as if it were an old gourd that won't hold any more wine. That's what you learn on the Continent, Memmo!"

"Yes; and if it were known that you had shot this hog, they would bring an action against you, and Ors' Anton' would neither intercede with the judges, nor pay for an advocate. Luckily no one saw you, and Saint Nega is here to save you from a scrape."

After a short deliberation, the two shepherds concluded that the wisest plan would be to throw the pig into the adjacent quagmire;

which plan they put into execution, but not until each of them had taken sundry rashers from the innocent victim of the feud between the Della Rebbias and the Barricini.



## CHAPTER XVII.

HAVING thus got rid of his troublesome escort, Orso continued his journey, and his mind dwelt rather upon the pleasure of meeting Miss Nevil again, than upon the fear of encountering his enemies. "The action that I shall bring against these miserable Barricini," said he to himself, "will compel me to go to Bastia. Why should I not accompany Miss Nevil thither? And why, from Bastia, should we not visit the baths of Orezza together?" Suddenly, recollections of his childhood reminded him distinctly of that picturesque spot. He fancied himself transported to a plot of green sward at the foot of venerable trees. Upon a lawn of luxuriant grass, studded with flowers as blue as the eyes which smiled upon him, he saw Miss Lydia sitting near him. She had taken off her bonnet, and her light tresses,

softer and finer than silk, shone like gold in the sunlight, which penetrated through the foliage. Her eyes, so translucently bright, seemed to him bluer than the firmament. With her face resting upon one of her hands, she was listening pensively to the words of love which he tremblingly addressed to her. She wore that muslin dress which she had worn on the last day that he had seen her at Ajaccio. From beneath the folds of her dress escaped a little foot in a slipper of black satin. Orso thought he would be very happy to kiss that foot; but one of Miss Lydia's hands was not gloved, and she was holding a daisy. Orso took that daisy from her, and Lydia's hand pressed his own; and he kissed the daisy, and afterwards the hand; and she was not angry. And all these thoughts prevented him from paying attention to the road which he was following, and yet he continued to look onward. He was going a second time to kiss Miss Nevil's white hand in imagination, when he nearly kissed in reality the neck of his horse, which suddenly stopped. It was because little Chilina stood in the way, and had seized it by the bridle.

"Where are you going, Ors' Anton'?" she

said. "Don't you know that your enemy is near here?"

"My enemy!" cried Orso, displeased at such an interruption at such an interesting moment. "Where is he?"

"Orlanduccio is near here. He is waiting for you. Turn back, for Heaven's sake, turn back!"

"Oh! he is waiting for me! Did you see him?"

"Yes, Ors' Anton', I was lying in the thicket when he passed. He was looking in every direction with his spy-glass."

"Which way did he go?"

"He went down there, in the direction you are going."

"Thank you."

"Would it not be better, Ors' Anton', to wait for my uncle? He will soon be here, and with him you would be in safety."

"Don't be afraid, Chili, I don't need your uncle's help."

"If you wished, I would go before you."

"Thank you, I won't trouble you."

And Orso, spurring his horse, rode rapidly forward in the direction which the little girl had indicated.

His first feeling had been a blind transport of rage, and he had said to himself that fortune now offered him an excellent opportunity for chastising the coward who had mutilated a horse in revenge for a blow. But as he rode onward, the kind of promise which he had made to the Prefect, and above all things, the fear of missing Miss Nevil's visit, altered his sentiments, and made him almost desire not to meet Orlanduccio. Presently, however, the memory of his father, the insult done to his horse, and the threats of the Barricini, rekindled his anger, and stimulated him to seek out his enemy in order to provoke him and compel him to fight. Thus agitated by contrary resolutions, he continued to ride forward ; but now he cautiously examined every bush and hedge, and even halted sometimes to listen to those vague noises which are always to be heard in the open country. Ten minutes after he had left little Chilina—it was then about nine o'clock in the morning—he found himself at the summit of an extremely steep hill. The road, or rather the hardly discernible track which he was following, led across a *máquis* which had recently been burned. In this place, the ground was covered with white ashes, whilst here and

there stunted shrubs, and a few large trees, blackened by the fire, and entirely stripped of their foliage, still remained standing, although they had ceased to live. On seeing a burnt *mdquis*, the traveller imagines himself transferred to some northern land in midwinter, and the contrast of the aridity of the space which the flames have ravaged, with the luxuriant vegetation all around it, makes it appear all the more gloomy and desolate. But in this landscape, at that moment, Orso saw only one thing, which, it is true, was most important to a man in his position; as the land was bare, it could not conceal an ambuscade; and when you anticipate at every instant to be shot at from behind a tree or thicket, you may reasonably look upon an open space, where such concealment is impossible, as a kind of oasis. The burnt *mdquis* was succeeded by several cultivated fields, enclosed, according to the custom of the country, within low stone-walls. The path ran through these enclosures; in which several enormous chestnut-trees, irregularly planted, presented at a distance the appearance of a clump of wood.

Compelled by the steepness of the declivity to dismount, Orso, who had dropped the bridle

on his horse's neck, was rapidly descending the hill over the slippery ashes ; but when he arrived at the distance of about five and twenty paces from one of the enclosures, he perceived, precisely facing him, first the barrel of a gun, and then a head peering over the top of the wall. The gun was quickly lowered, and he perceived Orlanduccio taking deadly aim at him. Orso threw himself quickly into an attitude of defence, and the two foes, with their rifles levelled, looked at each other for a few moments with that poignant emotion which the bravest man cannot but experience at the moment of causing or suffering death.

“ Miserable coward ! ” cried Orso ; but before he could finish his sentence he saw the flash of Orlanduccio's gun, and almost at the same time another shot was fired at his left, on the other side of the path, by another man whom he had not perceived, and who had taken aim at him from behind another wall. Both balls hit him : Orlanduccio's shot passed through his left arm, which he had exposed when levelling his piece ; the other struck him on the breast and tore his coat, but, fortunately meeting the blade of his stiletto, became flattened against it, and only occasioned a slight contusion. Orso's left arm

fell motionless by his side, and his gun dropped for an instant, but he immediately raised it again, and levelling it with his right arm alone, fired at Orlanduccio. The head of his enemy, which he could only discern as far as the eyes, disappeared behind the wall. Orso then turned to the left, and discharged his second barrel against a man surrounded with smoke, whom he could scarcely perceive. This figure also disappeared in its turn. The four shots had succeeded each other with incredible rapidity, and never had the expertest rifleman allowed a less interval to elapse in file-firing. After Orso's last shot, all became silent. The smoke from his gun rose slowly towards the clouds: there was no movement behind the wall—not even the slightest noise. But for the agony which he felt in his arm, he might have thought that the men at whom he had just fired were mere phantoms of his imagination.

As he expected a second discharge, Orso moved a few steps in order to place himself behind one of the burned trees which remained standing in the *maquis*. When he had reached this shelter, he placed his gun between his knees, and hastily reloaded it. Meanwhile his left arm caused him most cruel sufferings, and

it seemed to him as though an enormous weight were pressing him down. But what had become of his adversaries? He could not understand their inaction. If they had fled, or if they had been wounded, he would assuredly have heard some noise, some movement among the foliage. Could they be both dead; or rather were they not awaiting, under cover of their wall, a fresh opportunity to fire at him? In this state of uncertainty, and feeling his strength rapidly failing, he planted his right knee on the ground, rested his wounded arm on the other, and made use of a branch which projected from the trunk of a burnt tree to support his gun. With his finger on the trigger, his eyes fixed upon the wall, and his ear attentive to the slightest sound, he remained motionless for a few minutes, which seemed to him an age. At length, far behind him, he heard a distant cry, and presently a dog, descending the hill with the rapidity of an arrow, stopped beside him and began to wag his tail. It was Brusco, the disciple and companion of the bandits, whose approach doubtless announced the arrival of his master; and never was an honest man more impatiently expected. The dog, with his muzzle in the air, turned in the direction of the nearest



enclosure, began to snuffle restlessly. Suddenly he uttered a low growl, leaped over the wall with a bound, and re-appeared almost immediately on the top, from whence he contemplated Orso fixedly, with eyes as clearly expressive of surprise as it is possible for a dog's eyes to be; then he started off again with his nose in the wind, this time in the direction of the other enclosure, and jumped over that wall also. In less than a moment, he re-appeared on the top, manifesting the same appearance of anxiety and astonishment; then he plunged into the *maquis*, with his tail between his legs, still looking at Orso, and receding slowly from him, by a sidelong movement, until he had reached a considerable distance. Then, resuming his activity, he ran up the hill almost as quickly as he had ran down it, to meet a man who was advancing rapidly over the ridge.

"Help! Brando! help!" cried Orso, as soon as he thought him within earshot.

"Ha! Ors' Anton'! are you wounded?" inquired Brandolaccio, running up to him, quite out of breath. "In the body or in the limbs?"

"In the arm."

"In the arm! that's nothing. And the other man?"

"I think I must have hit him."

Brandolaccio, following his dog, ran to the nearest enclosure, and leaned over to look on the other side of the wall. Then, taking off his cap, he said: "Good night to Signor Orlanduccio!" Then, turning towards Orso, he saluted him in his turn with great seriousness, and said: "That is what I call a man properly accommodated."

"Does he still live?" demanded Orso, breathing with difficulty.

"Not in the slightest degree; the ball which you have sent into his eye has finished him completely. *Sangue de la Madonna!* what a hole! A good gun, by all the saints! What calibre! There are not many brains left in his head! When first I heard *pif! pif!* I said to myself: 'Hallo! they're playing tricks upon my lieutenant.' Then I heard, *boom! boom!* 'Aha!' said I, 'that's the English gun, sending an answer.' But, Brusco, what do you want with me?"

The dog led him to the other enclosure. "I beg pardon," exclaimed Brandolaccio in amazement. "A double shot, a double hit!

neither more nor less. Deuce take it! one would think powder was dear, you are so economical of it."

"In God's name, what do you mean?" exclaimed Orso.

"Come! come! don't be modest, lieutenant!" replied the bandit. "You knock down your game, and leave others the trouble to count it. Well, one person will have an odd kind of dessert to-day; and that is old Advocate Barricini. If you want butcher's meat, here's plenty! Now who the deuce will be his heir?"

"What! is Vincentello dead too?"

"Dead as a door-nail. *Salute a noi.\** There's one good point about you, you don't put them into much pain. Come and look at Vincentello: he is still on his knees, with his head resting against the wall. He looks as if he were asleep. This is a case which we may call a leaden slumber. Poor devil!"

Orso turned away his head in horror.

"Are you sure that he is dead?" he asked.

\* Good health to those who survive!—an exclamation which ordinarily accompanies the word *death*, and serves as a kind of corrective to it.

“You are like Sampiero Corso, who never gave but one blow,” answered the bandit. “Look you, there—in the breast on the left side—just in the place where Vincileone was hit at Waterloo. I’ll bet that the bullet is not very far from the heart. A double shot!—Ah! I never had such luck. Two with two bullets! There they be! both the brothers! If he had had a third chance, he would have killed their papa. He’ll do better another time.—But what a shot, Ors’ Anton’!—And to think that it will never happen to a brave fellow like me to have the same luck with a couple of gendarmes!”

Whilst he was speaking, the bandit cut open Orso’s coat-sleeve with his stiletto, and began to examine the wound.

“It’s a mere nothing,” he said. “Madoiselle Colomba won’t mind the trouble of mending this coat. Hallo! what do I see there? that wound on your breast?—I suppose nothing went in, though, or you would not be quite so lively. Come, try to move your fingers. Do you feel my teeth when I bite your little finger? Not much? Never mind, you’ll soon be all right again. Let me take your pocket-handkerchief and your

cravat. That coat is quite done for. Why the deuce did you dress up so finely? Were you going to a wedding? There, drink a drop of wine. Why don't you carry a gourd? A Corsican ought never to go out without his gourd."

Then he would suddenly leave off dressing the wound to exclaim: "A double shot! both of them stark dead! Won't the Parson laugh? A double shot! Ah! here comes at last that little tortoise Chilina."

Orso made no answer. He was as pale as death, and trembled in every limb.

"Chili," cried Brandolaccio, "go and look behind that wall."

The child climbed with both hands and feet to the top of the wall, and, as soon as she saw the corpse of Orlandaccio, she made the sign of the cross.

"That's nothing," continued the bandit. "Go a little further, and look behind the other wall."

The child did so, and crossed herself again.

"Was it you, uncle?" she inquired timidly.

"Me! haven't I become an old good-for-

nothing! It's the work of M. Orso, Chili. Pay him your compliments."

"Miss Colomba will be very pleased," said Chilina; "though she will be very sorry to hear you are wounded, Ors' Anton'."

"Come, lieutenant," said the bandit, when he had finished dressing the wound; "Chilina has caught your horse. Mount, and come with me to the *madquis* of Stazzona. He will be clever who can find you there. We will treat you to our best. When we reach the cross of St. Christine you will have to dismount. You shall give your horse to Chilina, who shall go and tell your sister the news, and on the road, you shall give her your directions. You may tell the little wench all your secrets, Ors' Anton'; she would rather be cut to pieces than betray her friends."

Then turning to her, he said in a very affectionate tone: "Get along, you young jade! be cursed and excommunicated, you little slut!"

Brandolaccio, who shared in the superstitious feelings of most bandits, was afraid of fascinating children by bestowing praises or blessings upon them, for it is well known that the mysterious powers which preside over the

*Annocchiatura*\* have got into the bad habit of performing just the contrary of our wishes.

"Whither do you wish me to go, Brando?" said Orso in a stifled voice.

"Oh! it's easy to choose: to prison or else to the *mdquis*. But a Della Rebbia does not know the road to prison. To the *mdquis*, Ors' Anton'!"

"Farewell, then, to all my hopes!" sorrowfully exclaimed the wounded man.

"Your hopes? Deuce take it! did you expect to do better with a double-barrelled gun? Ah! by the way, how the devil did they manage to hit you? They must have had as many lives as a cat to do it."

"They fired first," said Orso.

"Ah! true, I forgot.—*Pif! pif!—Boom! boom!*—A double shot with one hand†!—When anybody does better than that, I'll go

\* An involuntary fascination which is exercised either by the eye or by the voice.

† If any incredulous sportsman denies the possibility of M. della Rebbia's double shot, I would recommend him to go to Sartène, and inquire how one of the most distinguished and respected inhabitants of that town delivered himself, when his left arm was broken, from a position at least equally dangerous.

and hang myself. Very good; now you are mounted—but before you go, take a look at your work. It is not polite to leave company in this way without bidding them good-bye.”

Orso set spurs to his horse; not for worlds would he have looked at the unhappy young men whose death he had just occasioned.

“Well, Ors’ Anton’,” said the bandit, taking hold of the horse’s bridle, “will you allow me to speak frankly to you? After all, without any offence to you, I can’t help feeling sorry for those two poor young men. I beg you to excuse me. So handsome—so strong—so young! Orlanduccio, with whom I have hunted so often—only four days ago, he gave me a bundle of cigars. Vincentello too, who was always so good-tempered! It’s true that you only did your duty—and besides, the shot was too splendid to be regretted. But, you know, I had no share in your desire for vengeance. I know that you have done right: when you have an enemy, you must get rid of him. But the Barricini were an old family. There’s one less in the island!—and by a double shot!—it’s really curious.”



Thus pronouncing the funeral oration of the Barricini, Brandolaccio hastily led Orso, Chilina, and the dog Brusco towards the *maquis* of Stazzona.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

MEANWHILE Colomba, shortly after Orso's departure, had learned from her spies that the Barricini were on the watch for him ; and from that moment, she was a prey to the most distracting anxiety. She ran about the house in every direction, going from the kitchen into the rooms prepared for her guests, seeming very busy but doing nothing, and incessantly looking out to see if there were not some unusual movement in the village. At about eleven o'clock, a rather numerous cavalcade entered Pietranera ; it was the Colonel, his daughter, their servants, and a guide. As soon as she saw them, Colomba's first inquiry was : " Have you met my brother ? " Then she questioned the guide as to the road they had taken, and the time at which they had started ; and his answers only served to increase her astonishment that they had not met him.

"Perhaps your brother took the upper road," said the guide, "we came by the lower road."

But Colomba shook her head and renewed her questions. Notwithstanding her natural fortitude, which was increased by a proud desire to conceal all weakness from strangers, she found it impossible to dissemble her anxiety; and ere long she communicated her fears to the Colonel, and more especially to Miss Lydia, after she had informed them of the attempt at reconciliation which had had so unfortunate an issue. Miss Nevil became agitated, and wished that messengers should be despatched in every direction; and her father offered to remount his horse and go with the guide in search of Orso. The fears of her guests, however, reminded Colomba of her duties as mistress of the house. She attempted to smile, pressed the Colonel to sit down to table, and found twenty plausible reasons to explain her brother's delay, which she disproved almost as soon as she had uttered them. Believing that it was his duty, as a man, to endeavour to tranquillize the ladies, the Colonel suggested his explanation also.

"I'll bet," he said, "that Della Rebbia fell

in with some game ; he couldn't resist the temptation, and we shall presently see him return with his bags full. By Jove !" he added, " we did hear four shots fired on the road. Two were louder than the others, and I said to my daughter : ' I'll warrant that that's Della Rebbia hunting. It must have been my gun that made such a noise.' "

Colomba turned pale, and Lydia, who was observing her attentively, easily divined the terrible suspicions which the Colonel's conjecture had suggested. After a few minutes' silence, Colomba eagerly inquired whether the two loud reports had preceded or succeeded the others. But neither the Colonel, nor his daughter, nor the guide, had paid sufficient attention to be able to remember.

At about one o'clock, as none of the messengers sent out by Colomba had yet returned, she summoned all her courage, and forced her guests to sit down to table ; but nobody but the Colonel was able to eat anything. At the slightest noise on the public square, Colomba ran to the window, and then returned suddenly to her seat ; and endeavoured, with even greater sadness, to continue with her friends an insignificant conversation to which no one paid the

slightest attention, and which was interrupted by long intervals of silence.

Suddenly, the gallop of a horse was heard. "Ah! this time it is my brother," cried Colomba, starting from her chair. But on seeing Chilina mounted astride on Orso's horse, she exclaimed in a voice of agony: "My brother is dead!"

The Colonel dropped his glass, Miss Nevil shrieked, and all ran to the door of the house. Before Chilina could dismount from her steed, she was lifted like a feather from the saddle by Colomba, who grasped her with the force of a vice. The child understood her terrible look, and her first words were: "He lives!" Colomba relaxed her grasp, and Chilina jumped to the ground with the agility of a kitten.

"And the others?" inquired Colomba hoarsely.

Chilina made the sign of the cross with two fingers. Immediately the deadly paleness of Colomba's countenance was succeeded by a bright flush of satisfaction. She cast a defiant glance at the house of the Barricini, and smilingly said to her guests: "Let us go in, and finish our coffee."

The Iris of the bandits had a long story to

tell. Her patois, translated into indifferent Italian by Colomba, and afterwards into English by Miss Nevil, drew many an oath from the Colonel, and many a sigh from his daughter: but Colomba listened impassibly, and betrayed her emotion only by tearing her damask napkin into rags. She interrupted the child five or six times to make her reiterate the assurance that Brandolaccio said the wound was not dangerous, and that he had seen many worse. At the end of her story, Chilina reported that Orso vehemently desired some writing-paper, and that he besought his sister to entreat a lady, who might perhaps have arrived at his house, not to leave until she had received a letter from him. "It was this," added the child, "which tormented him most; and after I had started, he called me back to tell me not to forget this message. He repeated it to me three times over." On hearing this injunction from her brother, Colomba smiled and pressed the hand of the English girl, who burst into tears, and did not think it necessary to translate this part of the narrative to her father.

"Yes, you will remain with me, my dear friend," exclaimed Colomba, embracing Miss Nevil, "and you shall help us."

Then, taking a quantity of old linen from a chest, she began to cut it into strips, to make bandages and lint. On seeing her sparkling eyes, her animated countenance, and her alternate anxiety and calmness, it would have been difficult to say whether she was more grieved at her brother's wound than delighted by the death of her enemies. One moment, she poured out a cup of coffee for the Colonel, and boasted of her skill in preparing it; the next, she distributed work to Miss Nevil and Chilina, and exhorted them to sew the bandages carefully; and ever and anon, she inquired whether Orso's wound caused him much pain. She was continually stopping in the midst of her work to say to the Colonel: "Two men so skilful! so terrible! He alone, wounded, with only one arm—he overcame them both! What courage, Colonel! Is he not a hero? Ah! Miss Nevil, what a happy thing it is to live in a quiet country like yours! I was sure that you did not yet know my brother! I had said: the sparrow-hawk will unfold its wings! You were deceived by his gentle looks. It was when he was by your side, Miss Nevil. Ah! if he could see you working for him. Poor Orso!"

Miss Lydia was not working at all, and

could not find a word to say. Her father inquired why information was not immediately given to the nearest magistrate; talked about a coroner's inquest, and a great many other things equally unknown in Corsica. Finally, he wanted to know whether the country-house of that kind Mr. Brandolaccio, who had taken care of the wounded man, was very far from Pietranera, and whether he could not go and see his friend at once.

Colomba replied with her habitual calmness, that Orso was in the *mâquis*; that he had a bandit for his nurse; that he would run great risk if he showed himself before he had made sure of the opinions of the Prefect and judges upon his case; and finally, that she would make arrangements for a skilful surgeon to pay him a secret visit. "Above all things, Colonel," she added, "remember that you heard the four shots, and that you told me that Orso did not fire first."

The Colonel couldn't understand her in the least, and his daughter did nothing but sigh and wipe her eyes.

The day was already far advanced, when a melancholy procession entered the village. Poor Barricini was bringing home the corpses of his



children, each of them lying across a mule that was led by a peasant. A crowd of clients and idlers followed the mournful *cortège*. With them came the gendarmes, who always arrived too late, and the deputy-mayor, who lifted his hands to heaven, and exclaimed incessantly :

“What will the Prefect say ?”

Several women, among whom was Orlanduccio's nurse, were tearing their hair, and howling dismally. But their noisy grief produced far less impression than the silent despair of one person, upon whom all eyes were fixed. This was the unhappy father, who ran from one corpse to the other, raising their earth-stained heads, kissing their discoloured lips, and supporting their stiffened limbs, as if to avoid the joltings of the road. Sometimes he was seen to open his mouth to speak, but he uttered no cry, no word. With his eyes intently fixed upon the dead bodies, he stumbled over the stones, and jostled against the trees, heedless of the obstacles that stood in his way.

The lamentations of the women, and the imprecations of the men, redoubled when they came in sight of Orso's house. Some Rebbianist shepherds having ventured to utter an acclamation of triumph, the indignation of their

adversaries could no longer be restrained. "Vengeance! vengeance!" shouted many voices. Stones were thrown, and two shots, fired against the windows of the room in which Colomba and her guests were sitting, pierced through the shutters, and scattered the splinters of wood over the table at which the two ladies were working. Miss Lydia shrieked with fright, the Colonel seized a gun, and Colomba, before he could prevent her, darted to the door of the house, and opened it impetuously. There, standing erect on the lofty threshold, with both hands extended, as if to curse her enemies, she exclaimed:

"Cowards! to fire at women, at strangers! Are you Corsicans? are you men? Wretches, who know only how to assassinate from behind, come on! I defy you! I am alone; my brother is afar. Kill me! kill my guests! that will be worthy of you. You dare not, cowards that you are! you know that we avenge ourselves. Go, go and weep like women, and thank us that we require no more of your blood!"

There was something terrible and imposing in Colomba's voice and attitude; at sight of her, the crowd drew back in alarm, as if she had been the apparition of one of those male-

volent fairies, about whom many a frightful story is told in Corsica during the winter evenings. The deputy-mayor, the gendarmes, and several of the women, took advantage of this movement to throw themselves between the two parties; for the Rebbianist shepherds were already preparing their weapons, and for a moment there was reason to fear that a general fight would take place on the public square. But both factions were now deprived of their chiefs; and the Corsicans, who are disciplined even in their animosities, rarely come to blows during the absence of the authors of their intestine wars. Moreover Colomba, rendered prudent by success, restrained her little garrison:

"Let these poor people weep," she said; "let the old man carry home his dead. Why kill the old fox now that he has no teeth to bite with? Giudice Barricini! remember the second of August; remember the blood-stained pocket-book in which you wrote with a forger's hand! My father had entered your debt in it; your sons have paid it. I give you a receipt in full, old Barricini!"

Colomba, with folded arms, and a smile of contempt on her lips, watched them carry the corpses into the house of her enemies, and saw

the crowd slowly disperse. Then she shut the door, and returning into the dining-room, said to the Colonel :

“I must beg your pardon a thousand times for my fellow-countrymen, Sir Thomas. I could never have believed that Corsicans would have fired upon a house which contained strangers, and I am ashamed for my country.”

That evening, when Miss Lydia had retired to her room, the Colonel followed her thither, and inquired if she did not think they would do well to start, the very next day, from a village in which they were continually exposed to the danger of being shot in the head,—and as soon as possible, to leave a country in which nothing was to be seen except murders and acts of treachery.”

Miss Nevil remained silent for some time, and it was evident that her father's proposition caused her no slight embarrassment. At length she said :

“How could we leave this unhappy girl at a time when she stands so much in need of consolation? Do you not think, papa, it would be very cruel in us to do so?”

“It was on your account that I made the suggestion, my dear,” said the Colonel; “and

if I knew that you were in safety in the hotel at Ajaccio, I assure you that I should be very sorry to leave this cursed island without having shaken our brave friend Della Rebbia by the hand again."

"Well, then, papa, let us stay a little longer, and before we go, let us at least make sure that we can be of no service to them."

"Bless your kind heart!" said the Colonel, kissing his daughter on the forehead. "I am delighted to see you so ready to make a sacrifice, in order to alleviate the misfortunes of others. Let us stay; no one ever yet repented of having done a good action."

Miss Lydia lay down on her bed; but could not go to sleep. Sometimes the vague noises which she heard seemed to her the preparations for an attack upon the house; and anon, free from alarm for herself, she thought of the poor wounded man, who probably was stretched at that moment on the cold ground, with no other attentions than those which he might expect from the charity of a bandit. She pictured him to herself covered with blood, and writhing in horrible anguish; but it was a singular fact that, whenever the image of Orso presented itself to her mind, he always appeared to her

just as he had looked at the moment of his departure, pressing to his lips the talisman she had given to him. Then she thought of his bravery. She reflected that he had exposed himself to the terrible danger from which he had just escaped, on her account, in order to see her a little sooner. She almost persuaded herself that it was in her defence that Orso had got his arm broken. She reproached herself with having occasioned his wound, but she admired him all the more for it; and although the famous double shot did not possess in her eyes as much merit as in those of Brandolaccio and Colomba, she was nevertheless convinced that few heroes of romance would have displayed equal intrepidity and coolness in circumstances of equal danger.

The room which she occupied was that in which Colomba usually slept. Above a kind of fald-stool of polished oak, and beside a branch of consecrated palm, there hung a miniature portrait of Orso in the uniform of a sub-lieutenant. Miss Nevil took down the portrait, gazed at it for a long while, and finally placed it near her bed, instead of restoring it to its place on the wall. She did not fall asleep until day-break, and the sun had already risen

far above the horizon when she awoke. She perceived Colomba by her bed-side, silently awaiting the moment when she should open her eyes.

"Well! Miss Nevil, are you not very uncomfortable in our poor house?" inquired Colomba. "I fear you have hardly slept at all."

"Have you any news of him, my dear friend?" said Miss Lydia, rising on her pillow. Then, she perceived Orso's portrait, and hastily threw a handkerchief over it, to hide it.

"Yes, I have heard from him," said Colomba, smiling. And taking up the portrait, she added: "Do you think it like him? He is handsomer than that."

"Good gracious!" said Miss Nevil in confusion, "I took down that portrait by mistake. I'm always meddling with everything, and never put anything in its place again. How is your brother?"

"Pretty well. Giocanto came here this morning before four o'clock. He brought me a letter for you, Miss Lydia; Orso has not written to me. It is true there is on the address: To Colomba; but lower down he has written: For Miss N——. Sisters are not jealous. Giocanto says it pained him a great

deal to write. Giocanto, who writes a splendid hand, offered to write at his dictation: but Orso would not let him. He wrote with a pencil, lying on his back. Brandolaccio held the paper. Every moment my brother tried to sit up, and then, at the slightest movement, he felt the most dreadful pains in his arm. 'It was quite sad to see him,' Giocanto said. Here is his letter."

Miss Nevil read the letter, which was written in English, probably as an additional precaution. It ran thus :

"DEAR MISS NEVIL,

"An unfortunate fatality has brought me to my present position. I know not what my enemies will say, or what calumnies they will invent. It matters little to me, if you do not believe them. Ever since I saw you, I have indulged in the insanest dreams. This catastrophe was necessary to show me the extent of my madness; but I am reasonable now. I know what future fate awaits me, and I shall meet it with resignation. The ring which you gave me, and which I thought a talisman of happiness, I dare not keep any longer. I fear, Miss Nevil, that you may regret having be-



stowed your gift on one so unworthy ; or rather, I am afraid that it will remind me of the time when I was mad. Colomba will return it to you. Farewell, Miss Nevil, you are about to leave Corsica, and I shall see you no more : but tell my sister that I still possess your esteem, for believe me, I still deserve it.

“ O. D. R.”

Miss Lydia had turned aside her head to read this letter, and Colomba, who was watching her attentively, gave her the Egyptian ring with a look of inquiry as to what it all meant. Miss Lydia, however, did not dare to raise her head, but remained looking sadly at the ring, which she kept slipping on and off her finger.

“ Dear Miss Nevil,” said Colomba, “ May I not know what my brother has written to you ? Does he say anything about his present condition ? ”

“ No,” said Miss Lydia, blushing deeply, “ he says nothing about it. His letter is in English. He wishes me to tell my father ;—that is, he hopes the Prefect will be able to arrange——”

Colomba, smiling archly, sat down on the bed, took Miss Nevil by both hands, and look-

ing into her face with her penetrating eyes, inquired: "Will you be kind? Will you not send an answer to my brother? You can do him so much good! For a moment the idea occurred to me to wake you when his letter arrived, but after all, I did not dare."

"You acted very wrongly," said Miss Nevil, "if a line from me could——"

"Now I cannot send him any letters. The Prefect has arrived, and Pietranera is full of his officers. By and by we will see how to manage it. Ah! if you knew my brother, Miss Nevil, you would love him as I do. He is so kind! so brave! Think of what he has done! Alone and wounded, against two!"

The Prefect had returned. On receiving an express message from the deputy-mayor, he had come back accompanied by gendarmes and cavalry, bringing with him, moreover, the Procureur-royal, the Greffier, and other officials, to inquire into the new and terrible catastrophe which had complicated, or rather terminated, the hostilities of the two families of Pietranera. Shortly after his arrival, he saw Colonel Nevil and his daughter, and did not conceal from them his fears that the affair would take a bad turn. "You know," he said, "that the fight

took place without witnesses; and the reputation of those two unfortunate young men for courage and skill was so well established, that everybody refuses to believe that M. della Rebbia could have shot them without the assistance of the bandits, among whom, it is said, he has taken refuge."

"Impossible!" cried the Colonel; "Orso della Rebbia is a young man of the strictest honour: I'll answer for him."

"I think so too," said the Prefect, "but the Procureur-royal, (these gentlemen are always suspicious) does not appear to me very favourably disposed. He has in his hands a document which may prove fatal to your friend. It is a threatening letter addressed to Orlanduccio, in which he appoints a place of meeting, and this rendez-vous appears to him an ambuscade."

"But Orlanduccio," said the Colonel, "refused to fight like a gentleman."

"Duels are not customary here. A man lies in ambush, and shoots his enemy from behind: that is the practice in this country. There is only one favourable deposition, that of a little girl who declares that she heard four reports, the last two of which were much louder than the others, and must have proceeded from a

gun of large calibre, like that used by M. della Rebbia. Unfortunately the child is the niece of one of the bandits who are suspected of complicity, and she has been taught her lesson."

"But, sir," interrupted Miss Lydia, blushing up to her eyes, "we were on the road when the shots were fired, and we heard the very same thing."

"Indeed! That is very important. And you, Colonel, doubtless made the same remark?"

"Yes," replied Miss Nevil, quickly, "my father, who is accustomed to fire-arms, said to me: 'I'm sure that's M. della Rebbia shooting with my gun.'"

"And were those two shots which you recognized really and truly the last?"

"Yes, the two last; were they not, papa?"

The Colonel had not a very good memory; but under all circumstances, he was careful not to contradict his daughter.

"You must immediately mention this to the Procureur, Colonel. Besides, we expect a surgeon this evening who is to examine the corpses, and report whether the wounds were caused by the rifle in question."

"I gave it to Orso myself," said the Colonel,

“and I wish it were at the bottom of the sea ;  
— that is—the brave fellow!—I am very  
glad that he had it in his hands at the time ;  
for, without my Manton, I don’t know how he  
would have fared.”

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE surgeon arrived rather late. He had met with an adventure on the road. Being encountered by Giocanto Castriconi, he had been requested with the greatest politeness to come and bestow his attentions upon a wounded man. He had then been led to the side of Orso's couch in the *maquis*, and had applied the first dressing to his wound. When this was done, the bandit had accompanied him to a considerable distance, and had greatly edified him by talking to him of the most famous professors of Pisa, who, he said, were his most intimate friends.

"Doctor," said the theologian as he left him, "you have inspired me with too much esteem for me to think it necessary to remind you that a physician should be as discreet as a confessor." Then, playfully tapping the

trigger of his gun, he added: "You have forgotten the place where we had the honour to meet. Good-bye: I'm delighted to have made your acquaintance."

Colomba besought the Colonel to be present at the autopsy of the two dead bodies.

"You are better acquainted than anybody else with my brother's gun," she said, "and your presence will be very useful. Besides, there are so many wicked people here that we should run great risks if we had no one to watch over our interests."

On being left alone with Miss Lydia, she complained of a bad headache, and proposed to take a walk in the neighbourhood of the village.

"The fresh air will do me good," she said. "It is such a long time since I enjoyed a breeze."

As they walked, she turned the conversation to her brother; and Miss Lydia, who was considerably interested by this subject, did not perceive that they were wandering far from Pietranera. The sun was setting when she noticed their distance from home, and she immediately requested Colomba to return. Colomba said she knew a by-path which would

take them home very soon; and quitting the path along which they had hitherto been walking, she took another which was apparently much less frequented. Presently she began to ascend a hill so steep that she was frequently obliged to cling for support to the branches of trees with one hand, whilst with the other she dragged her companion after her. After spending a full quarter of an hour in this toilsome ascent, they reached a little plateau covered with myrtles and arbutus-trees, between which large masses of granite projected from the ground on every side. Miss Lydia was very tired, the village was out of sight, and the evening was closing in rapidly.

"Do you know, my dear Colomba," she said, "I am afraid we have lost our way."

"Don't be afraid," replied Colomba. "Let us walk on; if you follow me, we shall soon reach our journey's end."

"But I assure you that you are mistaken; the village cannot be in that direction. I feel convinced that we are going further and further from it. Look! those lights which we see so far away—that certainly must be Pietranera!"

"My dear friend," said Colomba in great



agitation, "you are right; but a hundred yards hence—in this *maquis*——"

"Well?"

"My brother is lying: I might see him and embrace him, if you would allow me."

Miss Nevil started with surprise.

"I came away from Pietranera," continued Colomba, "without being remarked, because I was with you—otherwise I should have been followed. To be so near him and not to see him! Why will you not come with me to see my poor brother? It would give him so much pleasure!"

"But Colomba—it would not be proper for me to do so."

"I understand. You women of the towns are always tormenting yourselves whether it will be proper and becoming: we women of the village think only whether it will be kind and useful."

"But it is so late! And your brother, what will he think of me?"

"He will think that he is not deserted by his friends, and that will give him courage to endure his sufferings."

"And my father—he will be so anxious——"

"He knows you are with me. Come! you

must decide at once. You were looking at his portrait this morning," she added, with a roguish smile.

"No—really, Colomba, I don't dare—those bandits who are with him——"

"Never mind; the bandits don't know who you are; and what matter if they did? You wanted to see some!"

"Good heavens! What shall I do?"

"Now, my dear Miss Nevil, you must make up your mind. I cannot think of leaving you here alone; nobody knows what might happen to you. Either let us go and see Orso, or else let us return together to the village. I shall see my brother—God knows when—perhaps never——"

"Don't say so, Colomba! Well then! let us go! but for one minute only, and then we must return as fast as we can."

Colomba pressed her hand, and without replying, began to walk forward with such rapidity that Miss Lydia could hardly keep up with her. Luckily, Colomba stopped very soon, and said to her companion:

"We must not go any further until we have given notice of our approach; or we may perhaps get shot by mistake."

She then uttered a shrill whistle; soon after, a dog was heard barking in answer, and presently the advanced guard of the bandits made his appearance. It was our old acquaintance Brusco, who immediately recognized Colomba, and volunteered his services as her guide. After many windings through the narrow pathways of the *maquis*, two men, armed to the teeth, presented themselves before them.

"Is that you, Brandolaccio?" inquired Colomba. "Where is my brother?"

"Close by," answered the bandit. "But don't make any noise: he is asleep, and this is the first nap he has had since his accident. 'Pon my soul! it's very clear that a woman can go anywhere, if she takes it into her head."

The two girls went onward cautiously, and near a fire, the flames of which had been prudently concealed by means of a little wall of dry stones which the bandits had built round it, they perceived Orso lying on a heap of fern, covered by a pilone. He was very pale, and his quick breathing was distinctly audible. Colomba sat down by his side, and gazed at him in silence, with her hands clasped as if in prayer. Miss Lydia, covering her face

with her handkerchief, sat close behind her; but from time to time, she lifted her head to look at the wounded man over Colomba's shoulder. A quarter of an hour passed without any one uttering a word. On a signal from the theologian, Brandolaccio had withdrawn with him into the *madquis*, to the great satisfaction of Miss Lydia, who, for the first time, thought that the long beards and uncouth equipment of the bandits had a little too much local colour.

At length Orso began to move. Colomba immediately bent over him and kissed him repeatedly, overwhelming him with questions about his wound, his sufferings, and his requirements. When he had answered that he was as well as could be expected, Orso inquired in his turn whether Miss Nevil were still at Pietranera, and whether she had written to him. Colomba, leaning over her brother, concealed her companion completely from him: but even without this shelter, the darkness would have rendered it almost impossible for him to recognize her. Colomba held Miss Nevil by one hand, while with the other she gently supported the head of the wounded man.

"No, dear brother, she has given me no

letter for you; but you are always thinking about Miss Nevil; do you love her so very much?"

"Do I love her? what a question, Colomba! But she—perhaps she despises me now!"

Just then, Miss Nevil made an effort to withdraw her hand: but it was not very easy to make Colomba let go; for, although it was small and well-shaped, her hand possessed an unusual amount of strength, as we have already seen.

"Despise you!" exclaimed Colomba, "after what you have done. On the contrary, she speaks of you in the highest terms. Ah! Orso, I could tell you a great many things about her."

The hand still endeavoured to release itself, but Colomba only pulled it nearer and nearer to Orso.

"But then," said the wounded man, "why did she not answer my letter? A single line, and I should have been satisfied."

By dint of pulling Miss Nevil's hand, Colomba succeeded at last in placing it within her brother's. Then, starting up suddenly with a burst of laughter, she exclaimed: "Take care, Orso,

how you find fault with Miss Nevil, for she understands Corsican very well."

Miss Lydia immediately withdrew her hand, and stammered some unintelligible words. Orso thought he was dreaming.

"You here, Miss Nevil! Good heavens! how did you venture? Ah! how happy you have made me!" And rising with a great effort, he attempted to draw near to her.

"I accompanied your sister," said Miss Nevil, "that no one might suspect where she was going, and then—I wished also—to make sure——Alas! how wretchedly uncomfortable you must be here."

Colomba now sat down behind Orso. She lifted him up with the greatest precaution, so as to let his head rest upon her knees. Then she put her arms round his neck, and beckoned to Miss Lydia to come nearer. "Nearer! nearer still!" she said: "an invalid must not be permitted to speak too loud." And as Miss Lydia hesitated, she caught her by the hand, and forced her to sit so near to them, that her dress touched Orso, and her hand, which Colomba still held fast, rested on the shoulder of the wounded man.

"Now he's very comfortable," said Colomba

gaily. "Don't you think it's very pleasant, Orso, to bivouac in the *maquis* on a fine night like this?"

"Oh, yes! 'tis a beautiful night!" said Orso. "I shall never forget it."

"How you must suffer!" said Miss Nevil.

"I do not suffer now," said Orso, "and I could wish to die here." And his right hand sought that of Miss Lydia, which Colomba still held closely imprisoned.

"You must really be conveyed to some other place where proper care can be bestowed on you, M. della Rebbia," said Miss Nevil. "I shall not be able to sleep, now that I have seen your poor plight in the open air."

"If I had not been afraid of meeting you, Miss Nevil, I should have attempted to return to Pietranera, to surrender myself a prisoner."

"Well! why were you afraid of meeting her, Orso?" inquired Colomba in surprise.

"I had disobeyed you, Miss Nevil, and I should not have dared to look you in the face under such circumstances."

"I declare, Miss Lydia, that you make my brother do all that you please," said Colomba laughing. "I shall forbid you to see him."

"I hope," said Miss Nevil, "that this un-

fortunate affair will be satisfactorily explained, and that you will soon have nothing to fear. I shall be very glad when we leave, to know that justice has been done you, and that your honour as well as your bravery have been fully recognized."

"Are you going to leave us, Miss Nevil? Do not say that fatal word so soon."

"It must be so; my father cannot be always hunting. He wishes to go."

Orso dropped his hand until it touched Miss Nevil's, and there was a moment's silence.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Colomba, "we shall not let you leave us so soon. We have still a great many things to show you at Pietranera. Besides, you have promised to paint my portrait, and you have not begun it yet. And then I promised to compose a *serenata* for you in seventy-five couplets, And then—— But what's Brusco barking about? There is Brandolaccio running after him; I must go and see what's the matter."

She immediately rose, and, placing Orso's head without ceremony on Miss Nevil's knees, ran after the bandits.

Rather astonished to find herself thus supporting a handsome young man, *tête-à-tête* with



him in the midst of a *malquis*, Miss Nevil did not know what to do, for she was afraid that, by rising abruptly, she might hurt the wounded man. But Orso himself rose from the delightful resting-place which his sister had given him, and leaning on his right arm, said to her : " So you are going away soon, Miss Lydia. I never thought it likely that you would prolong your stay in this unhappy country, and yet, since you have come hither, I suffer a hundred times more when I think that I must bid you farewell. I am a poor lieutenant, without expectations, and now under terrible suspicion. It is not a favourable moment, Miss Lydia, to tell you that I love you ; but it is probably the only opportunity that I shall have, and I seem to be less unhappy, now that I have relieved my heart."

Miss Lydia turned aside her head, as if the darkness were not sufficient to conceal her blushes. " Monsieur della Rebbia," she said in a trembling voice, " should I have come here if——" and as she spoke, she placed the Egyptian talisman in Orso's hand. Then, making a violent effort to resume the bantering tone in which she usually spoke : " It is very wrong of you, M. Orso," she said, " to talk in this

way. In the midst of the *maquis*, and surrounded by your bandits, you know very well that I should never dare to refuse you anything."

Orso made a movement to kiss the hand which had returned to him the talisman; but, as Miss Lydia withdrew it rather quickly, he lost his balance and fell on his wounded arm. He could not refrain from a moan of agony.

"Have you hurt yourself, Orso?" she exclaimed, lifting him up; "it was my fault! forgive me." They continued to speak together for some time, sitting very near to one another. Colomba, who ran up hastily, found them in precisely that position in which she had left them.

"The soldiers!" she cried. "Orso, try to stand up and walk; I will support you."

"Leave me here," said Orso. "Tell the bandits to escape. Let them capture me, it matters little; but fly with Miss Lydia: in God's name, let no one see her here!"

"I'm not going to leave you," said Brandolaccio, who came up soon after Colomba. "The sergeant in command of the soldiers is a god-son of old Barricini. Instead of arresting you,

he would kill you, and then swear that he did not do it on purpose."

Orso attempted to stand, and even walked a few paces ; but he soon stopped, and said : " I cannot walk. You must escape without me. Farewell, Miss Nevil ; give me your hand, and fare you well ! "

" We will not leave you ! " cried both the women.

" If you can't walk," said Brandolaccio, " you must be carried. Come, lieutenant, pluck up your courage. We shall have plenty of time to decamp by the ravine, down below. Our friend, the parson, will give the soldiers plenty of occupation."

" No, leave me," said Orso, lying down on the ground. " In God's name, Colomba, take Miss Nevil home ! "

" You are strong, Miss Colomba," said Brandolaccio : " catch hold of him by the shoulders while I carry his feet. That's right ! Now forward, march ! "

They began to carry him rapidly along, in spite of his protestations : Miss Lydia followed them, horribly frightened, when a shot was heard, which was immediately answered by five or six others. Miss Lydia shrieked, Brando-

laccio began to swear, but he redoubled his speed, and Colomba, imitating his example, ran across the *maquis*, without bestowing the slightest attention to the branches which struck her face or tore her dress.

“Stoop, stoop, my dear,” she said to her companion. “A ball may hit you.” They walked, or rather ran, for about five hundred yards in this manner, when Brandolaccio declared that he could go no farther, and he laid Orso down, notwithstanding the exhortations and reproaches of Colomba.

“Where is Miss Nevil?” inquired Orso in alarm.

Miss Nevil, terrified by the firing, and stopped at every moment by the difficulties of the *maquis*, had soon lost the track of the fugitives, and had remained alone in a state of the utmost anguish and dismay.

“She has stopped behind,” said Brandolaccio, “but she is not lost: women are always sure to turn up again. Just listen, Ors’ Anton’, what a clatter the parson is making with your gun. Unfortunately, he can’t see a bit, and you don’t do much harm when you skirmish of a night.”

“Hush!” exclaimed Colomba. “I hear a horse—we are saved.”

In fact, a horse which had been feeding in the *maquis*, frightened by the noise of the musketry, was coming towards them.

"We are saved!" repeated Brandolaccio. To run to the horse, seize him by the mane, and bridle him hastily with a slip-knot and cord, was for the bandit, aided by Colomba, the work of a moment. "Now let us signal the parson," said he. He whistled twice: a distant whistle answered to the signal, and the loud voice of the Manton ceased to be heard. Then Brandolaccio mounted the horse. Colomba placed her brother before the bandit, who clasped him tightly with one hand, whilst with the other he guided his steed. Notwithstanding his double burden, the horse, stimulated by a couple of good kicks in the belly, started quickly and galloped down a steep rock at a pace which none but a Corsican horse could have equalled.

Colomba then turned back, and began to call Miss Nevil as loudly as she could, but no voice answered her cries. After having walked some distance at hap-hazard, in the hope of regaining the path which she had lost, she met a couple of soldiers who shouted to her to stop.

"Well! gentlemen," said Colomba in a bantering tone, "here's a pretty clatter! How many have you killed?"

"You were with the bandits," said one of the soldiers, "so you must come with us."

"Very willingly," she replied, "but I have a friend here, and we must find her first of all."

"Your friend is found already, and you will spend the night with her in gaol."

"In gaol? we shall see about that; but meanwhile, take me to her."

The soldiers then led her to the encampment of the bandits, where they had collected together all the trophies of their expedition, namely, the pilone which had covered Orso, an old pipkin, and a jar full of water. Thither also they had brought Miss Nevil, who, on being met by the soldiers, half dead with terror, had replied by tears to all their questions regarding the number of the bandits, and the direction which they had taken.

Colomba rushed into her arms, and whispered in her ear:

"They are saved!" Then, turning to the sergeant in command of the detachment, she said: "You see plainly, sir, that this young

lady knows nothing whatever about the subject of your questions. Allow us to return to the village, where we are expected with impatience."

"We'll take you there, and more quickly than you like, my little dear," said the sergeant; "and you'll have to explain what you were doing in the *maquis* at this late hour with the brigands who have just escaped. I don't know what magic the rascals use, but they certainly fascinate the girls, for wherever there are bandits you are sure to find pretty women."

"You are complimentary, sergeant," said Colomba, "but you will do well to pay attention to what you say. This young lady is a relative of the Prefect, and you must not crack your jokes upon her."

"A relative of the Prefect!" said one of the soldiers to his officer; "it is true, she has got a bonnet."

"Never mind the bonnet," said the sergeant "They were both of them with the parson, who is the greatest wheedler in the country, and my duty is to take them into custody. Now, then, we've nothing more to do here. But for that cursed Corporal Taupin—the drunken Frenchman showed himself before I

had quite surrounded the *máquis*—but for him we should have caught them in a net.”

“You are seven, I think,” observed Colomba. “Do you know, gentlemen, that if by chance the three brothers Gavabini, Sarocchi, and Theodore Poli, should happen to be at the cross of St. Christine with Brandolaccio and the parson, they might give you more than you would like. If you are going to have a conversation with the *commandant of the country*,\* I had rather not be present at it. Bullets don’t know their friends from their foes in the night.”

The possibility of an encounter with the redoubtable bandits whom Colomba had just named, seemed to make some impression upon the soldiers. Still cursing Corporal Taupin, the drunken Frenchman, the sergeant gave orders to retreat, and his little troop took the road to Pietranera, carrying with them the pilone and the pipkin. As for the water-pot, it was disposed of by a kick. One of the soldiers wanted to take Miss Lydia by the arm, but Colomba pushed him back directly, saying :

“Let no one dare to touch her. Do you think that we want to run away? Come, Lydia, my dear, lean upon me, and leave off

\* The title assumed by Theodore Poli.



crying like a child. This is an odd adventure, but it will not end amiss; in half an hour we shall be setting down to supper. For my part I'm dying of hunger."

"What will be thought of me?" said Miss Nevil, in a low tone.

"Why, it will be supposed that you lost your way in the *maquis*, that's all."

"What will the Prefect say?—above all, what will my father say?"

"The Prefect? you will tell him to mind his own business. Your father?—from the way in which you were chatting with Orso, I should have thought that you had something to say to your father."

Miss Nevil squeezed her arm without replying.

"Don't you think," murmured Colomba, in her ear, "that my brother deserves to be loved? Don't you love him a little?"

"Ah! Colomba," replied Miss Nevil, smiling, in spite of her confusion, "you betrayed me—me who had put so much confidence in you!"

Colomba passed her arm round her waist, and, kissing her on her forehead, said, in a very low tone:

"Will you forgive me, my little sister?"

"I can't help doing so, my terrible sister," replied Miss Nevil, returning her kiss.

The Prefect and the Procureur-royal were staying at the house of the deputy-mayor of Pietranera, and the Colonel, who was in great alarm about his daughter, had come for the twentieth time to inquire for news of her, when a soldier who had been sent forward by the sergeant, arrived with an account of the fearful battle which had been fought against the bandits, in which, it is true, no one had been either killed or wounded, but a capture had been made of a pipkin, a pilone, and two women, who were, he said, either the mistresses or the spies of the brigands. Thus announced, the two prisoners appeared in the midst of their armed escort. You may imagine the radiant countenance of Colomba, the shame of her companion, the surprise of the Prefect, and the joy and astonishment of the Colonel. The Procureur-royal took a malicious pleasure in subjecting poor Lydia to a kind of interrogatory, which did not end until he had put her quite out of countenance.

"It seems to me," said the Prefect, "that we may lawfully set these young ladies at liberty. They went out for a walk—nothing could be more

natural in this fine weather; and they chanced to meet an amiable young man with a wounded arm—that was very natural also.” Then, taking Colomba aside, he said: “My dear Miss della Rebbia, you may write to your brother that his affair has taken a better turn than I anticipated. The examination of the corpses, and the testimony of Colonel Nevil, prove that he only stood on his defence, and that he was alone at the time of the combat. The matter will soon be arranged, but he must leave the *maquis* at once, and surrender himself a prisoner.”

It was nearly eleven o'clock when the Colonel, his daughter, and Colomba, sat down to supper. Colomba ate heartily, and made great fun of the Prefect, the Procureur, and the soldiers. The Colonel also did justice to the meal, but did not say a word, and glanced continually at his daughter, who did not once lift her eyes from her plate. At length he said to her in English, in a kind but serious tone:

“Lydia, my dear, are you engaged to Della Rebbia?”

“Yes, papa, since this evening,” she replied blushing, but in a firm voice.

Then she raised her eyes, and perceiving no

sign of displeasure on her father's countenance, she threw herself into his arms and kissed him, as all well educated young ladies do on such occasions.

"That's right!" said the Colonel, "he's a brave fellow; but, by Jove! we won't live in his confounded country, or else I refuse my consent."

"I don't understand English," said Colomba, who was observing them with extreme curiosity; "but I'll warrant I have guessed what you are talking about."

"We were saying," replied the Colonel, "that we must take you with us on a trip to Ireland."

"Yes, willingly, and I shall be the *surella Colomba*. Is it agreed, Colonel? Shall we shake hands upon it?"

"In such cases we kiss each other," said the Colonel.

## CHAPTER XX.

A FEW months after the terrible event which (to quote the newspapers,) had plunged the commune of Pietranera into consternation, a young man, with his left arm in a sling, rode out of Bastia in the afternoon, and proceeded towards the village of Cardo, so celebrated for its fountain, which, in the summer time, supplies the delicate inhabitants of the town with delicious water. He was accompanied by a young lady, of commanding stature and remarkable beauty, mounted on a small black horse, whose strength and symmetry would have been admired by a connoisseur, but one of whose ears had unfortunately been lacerated by some strange accident. On reaching the village, the young lady leapt lightly from her steed, and, after having assisted her companion to dismount, unfastened some rather heavy bags which were tied to her saddle-bow. The

horses were entrusted to the care of a peasant ; and the lady carrying the bags under her mezzaro, and the young man with a double-barrelled gun in his hand, took the road up the mountain by a very steep pathway which seemed to lead to no human habitation. On reaching one of the lofty ridges of Monte Quercio, they halted, and both sat down on the grass. They seemed to be expecting some one, for they were incessantly looking in the direction of the mountain, and the young lady was continually consulting a handsome gold watch, more perhaps for the pleasure of contemplating a trinket which she did not seem to have possessed very long, than with a view to ascertain whether the appointed hour of rendezvous had arrived. They were not kept waiting long. A dog ran out of the *mdquis*, and, on being called Brusco by the young lady, hastened to fawn affectionately upon them. Shortly after, two bearded men made their appearance, with their rifles in their hands, their cartridge-boxes at their waists, and their pistols in their belts. Their torn and patched garments contrasted strangely with their brilliant weapons, which bore the name of a renowned Continental maker. Not-

withstanding the apparent inequality of their position, the four actors in this scene approached each other familiarly, as though they were old friends.

"Well, Ors' Anton'," said the elder of the bandits to the young man, "so your affair is finished. Verdict of acquittal. My compliments. I'm sorry that the advocate has left the island: he would have been so enraged at it. And how's your arm?"

"In a fortnight," answered the young man, "the doctor says I may leave off my sling. Brando, my brave fellow, I am going to start for Italy to-morrow, and I wished to bid the Parson and yourself good-bye. That is why I asked you to meet me here."

"You are in a great hurry," said Brando-laccio; "you were only acquitted yesterday, and you start to-morrow."

"He has business to attend to," said the young lady gaily. "Gentlemen, I have brought you some supper: I hope you'll like it. Don't forget my friend Brusco."

"You spoil Brusco, Miss Colomba, but he is grateful, as you shall see. Come, Brusco," he said, holding out his gun horizontally, "jump for the Barricini!"

The dog remained motionless, licking his muzzle, and looking fixedly at his master.

“Jump for the Della Rebbias!”

And he jumped two feet higher than was necessary.

“Listen, my friends,” said Orso, “your’s is a bad trade; and even if you do not end your lives upon the place which we can see down below there,\* the best that can happen to you is to be shot in a *madquis* by a gendarme.”

“Well,” said Castriconi, “it’s as good a death as any other, and a vast deal better than to die in your bed of fever, amid the more or less sincere lamentations of your heirs. When people like ourselves get accustomed to the open air, there is nothing so pleasant as to die in your shoes, as our villagers say.”

“I wish,” continued Orso, “I could see you safe out of this country—and leading a more tranquil life. For instance, why should you not go and settle in Sardinia, as many of your comrades have done? I should be delighted to furnish you with the means of doing so.”

“To Sardinia!” exclaimed Brandolaccio. “*Istos Sardos!* the devil fly away with them

\* The place of execution at Bastia.



and their jargon. They are not fit company for us."

"A man has no resources in Sardinia," observed the theologian. "For my part, I despise the Sardinians. They have a mounted militia to catch their bandits—which is the best criticism I can give both of the country and of the bandits.\* Sardinia wouldn't suit me. But I am very much surprised, Monsieur della Rebbia, that you, who are a man of taste and erudition, have not adopted our life in the *maquis*, after the experience you had of it."

"But," said Orso with a smile, "when I had the advantage of being your guest, I was not able properly to appreciate the charms of your position, and my sides still ache when I think of the ride I had one fine night, when I lay like a sack across a horse, under the care of my friend Brandolaccio."

"And the pleasure of escaping from pursuit," urged Castriconi, "do you count that

\* I am indebted for this critical remark upon Sardinia to an ex-bandit of my acquaintance, who must be considered entirely responsible for it. He means that bandits who allow themselves to be caught by horsemen must be blockheads, and that soldiers who pursue bandits on horseback have no chance of catching them.

for nothing? How can you be insensible to the charms of absolute liberty in such a splendid climate as ours? With this respect-compeller (pointing to his gun), you are a king everywhere, as far as your bullet can reach. You give orders, you redress wrongs. That, sir, is a very moral, and very agreeable amusement which we do not deny ourselves. What life can be grander than that of a knight-errant, when you are better armed and more sensible than Don Quixote? Why, the other day, I learned that the uncle of little Lilla Luigi, like an old miser as he is, wouldn't give her a dowry. I wrote to him, without any threats, for I don't like threats; well! the man was immediately convinced of his injustice, and gave his consent to the marriage. Thus I caused the happiness of two persons. Believe me, lieutenant, there's nothing to be compared to the life of a bandit. Pooh! you would most likely join us if it were not for a certain English lady of whom I only caught a glimpse, but whom everybody at Bastia talks about with admiration."

"My future sister-in-law does not like the *mâquis*," said Colomba, laughing, "she was too much frightened by her first visit."

"Well," said Orso, "you are determined to remain here. Be it so. Tell me, can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing," said Brandolaccio, "except to bear us in remembrance. You've overwhelmed us with kindness. Chilina's got a dowry, and won't need my friend the Parson to write any letters without threats in order to secure her settlement. We know that your steward will supply us with bread and powder when we want it: so good-bye. I shall hope to see you again in Corsica some day or other."

"In times of emergency," said Orso, "a few pieces of gold are very useful. Now that we are old acquaintances, I hope you will not refuse this little purse, which may be of great service to you."

"No money between us, lieutenant," said Brandolaccio in a resolute tone.

"Money is all very well in towns," said Castriconi, "but in the *maquis* a brave heart and a good gun are all we need."

"I don't want to leave you," continued Orso, "without giving you some present. Come, what can I give you, Brando?"

The bandit began to scratch his head, and glancing obliquely at Orso's gun, said:

"Why, lieutenant—if I dared—but no, you are too fond of it."

"What is it that you want?"

"Nothing—a mere nothing—I ought first to know how to use it. I'm always thinking of that confounded double shot with a single hand. Oh, no! that can't be done twice."

"Is it the gun you want? I brought it on purpose for you; but use it as little as you can."

"Oh! I promise not to use it as well as you did: but be assured that, when another has it, Brando Savelli will have gone to his long home."

"And you, Castriconi, what shall I give you?"

"As you positively wish to leave me a material remembrance of yourself, I'll take the liberty to ask you to send me the smallest possible edition of Horace. It will amuse me, and prevent me from forgetting my Latin. There is a little wench who sells cigars at Bastia on the quay; give it to her, and she will send it safely to me."

"You shall have an Elzevir, my classical friend," said Orso, "for I happen to have a very good copy in my library. Well; my

friends, we must part. Let us shake hands. If you should ever feel disposed to go to Sardinia, write to me; Advocate N—— will give you my address on the Continent.”

“To-morrow, lieutenant,” said Brando, “as you sail out of the port, look up to this spot on the mountain; we shall be here, and will signal you with our pocket-handkerchiefs.”

They then parted: Orso and his sister took the road to Cardo, and the bandits went up the mountain.

## CHAPTER XXI.

ON a fine morning in April, Colonel Sir Thomas Nevil, his daughter (who had been married a few days before), Orso and Colomba, rode out of Pisa in their carriage, to visit an Etruscan hypogeum, which had been recently discovered, and which every stranger went to see. When they had descended into the interior of the monument, Orso and his wife took out their pencils, and prepared to copy some of the paintings; so the Colonel and Colomba, both of whom cared very little about archæology, left them alone and went for a walk in the neighbourhood.

“My dear Colomba,” said the Colonel, “we shall never get back to Pisa in time for our luncheon. Are you not hungry? Orso and his wife have got among the antiquities; and

when they begin to sketch together, they are never willing to leave off."

"Yes," said Colomba, "and yet they never produce a single drawing."

"It's my opinion," said the Colonel, "that we had better go to that little farm down below. We shall be sure to find bread, and perhaps some aleatico; indeed I shouldn't be surprised if we got abundance of strawberries and cream; and there we could wait patiently for our artists."

"You are right, Colonel. It would be very wrong for you and me, who are the reasonable members of the family, to allow ourselves to be martyred by these two lovers, who live upon nothing but poetry. Give me your arm. Don't you think I'm improving? I take arms, wear fashionable bonnets and dresses, deck myself with jewels, and learn I don't know how many fine things, so that I am not quite so uncivilized as I was. Pray remark the gracefulness with which I wear this shawl. That fair man, the officer of your regiment, who was at the wedding;—dear me! I can't remember his name. A tall curly-headed man, whom I could easily knock down——"

"Chatworth?" inquired the Colonel.

"Yes, that's the name; but I shall never be able to pronounce it. Well! he is madly in love with me."

"Ah! Colomba, you are becoming quite a coquette. We shall soon have another wedding."

"Me! get married? Who, then, would bring up my nephew, when Orso has given me one? Who would teach him to speak Corsican? Yes, he shall speak Corsican, and I will make him a peaked cap on purpose to vex you."

"You must first wait till you have a nephew; and then you shall teach him to use the stiletto, if you please."

"Farewell to stilettos," said Colomba gaily; "now I carry a fan, to rap you on the knuckles with it when you find fault with my country."

Thus chatting, they entered the farm-house, where they found plenty of wine, strawberries, and cream. Colomba helped the farmer's wife to gather the fruit, while the Colonel was drinking his aleatico. At the corner of one of the paths, Colomba perceived an old man sitting in a garden-chair, and apparently in very ill health; for his cheeks were hollow, and his eyes sunken; he was extremely thin, and his



vacant stare, his pallor, and his motionless attitude made him appear more like a corpse than a living being. Colomba regarded him for several minutes with so much curiosity that she attracted the attention of the farmer's wife. "That poor man is one of your countrymen, Signora," she said, "for I can perceive by your accent that you come from Corsica. He met with heavy misfortunes in his native country : his sons were killed in a terrible manner. It is said,—I beg your pardon for repeating it, Signora,—that your countrymen are very vindictive in their animosities. Well ! this poor gentleman, on being left alone in the world, came to Pisa to visit a distant relation, who is the owner of this farm. The poor man is rather deranged through misfortune and grief. This was very troublesome to my mistress, who receives a great deal of company ; so she sent him here. He is very gentle, not at all troublesome : he hardly says three words a day. You see, his wits have left him. The doctor visits him every week, and he says he can't live very long."

"Ah ! his fate is sealed," said Colomba. "To a man in his position, it will be a happiness to die."

“ You should speak to him in Corsican a little, Signora ; it would perhaps delight him to hear his native language.”

“ We will see,” said Colomba with a bitter smile, and she walked towards the old man until her form shut out the sun from his eyes. Then the poor idiot lifted up his head and stared fixedly at Colomba, who returned his gaze, and still continued to smile. In an instant, the old man put his hand to his forehead, and shut his eyes as if to escape from Colomba’s glance. Presently, however, he opened them again, but immoderately wide ; his lips trembled ; he tried to stretch forth his hands ; but, fascinated by Colomba’s gaze, he remained fixed to his chair, unable either to speak or to move. At length, big tears flowed from his eyes, and heavy sobs broke from his breast.

“ This is the first time I have seen him so,” said the farmer’s wife. “ This young lady is a countrywoman of yours, and has come on purpose to see you,” she added, to the old man.

“ Mercy !” he exclaimed in a hoarse voice ; “ mercy ! Are you not yet satisfied ? That paper which I had burned, how did you contrive to

read it? But why kill them both? Orlanduccio's name was not written there. You should have left me one, one only. Orlanduccio,—you could have read nothing against him."

"I required the blood of both," whispered Colomba to him, in the Corsican dialect. "The branches are lopped off, and, if the stem were not rotten, I would have torn it up also! Go, cease to complain; you have not long to suffer. I suffered two years!"

The old man uttered a cry, and his head fell upon his breast. Colomba turned her back upon him, and walked towards the house with measured steps, singing some incomprehensible words from a ballata: "I must have the hand that inflicted—the eye that guided—the heart that devised——"

Whilst the farmer's wife was busily engaged in attending to the old man, Colomba, with heightened colour, and sparkling eyes, sat down to table with the Colonel.

"What is the matter with you?" he said. "You look just as you looked at Pietranera, on that day when the shots were fired at us while we were at dinner."

"Oh! some recollections of Corsica happened to come into my head. But it is all over now. I am to be godmother, am I not? Oh! what fine names I will give him: Ghilfuccio Tomaso Orso Leone!"

The farmer's wife entered at this moment. "Well!" inquired Colomba with the utmost coolness, "is he dead, or did he merely faint away?"

"It was nothing serious, Signora; but it is remarkable what an effect your presence had upon him."

"And the doctor says he can't live very long?"

"Not more than two months, perhaps."

"It will not be a great loss," observed Colomba.

"Who the deuce are you talking about?" inquired the Colonel.

"A poor idiot from Corsica," said Colomba, with an air of indifference, "who is boarding here. I will send from time to time to inquire after his health. But, Colonel Nevil, leave a few strawberries for my brother and Lydia."

When Colomba left the farm, and re-

entered the carriage, the farmer's wife followed her with her eyes for some time. "Do you see that very pretty young lady," she said to her daughter; "well! I am sure she has the evil eye!"

THE END.

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